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CO-OP

The Works of UPTON SINCLAIR

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MARIE ANTOINETTE. A Play
LETTERS TO A MILLIONAIRE
TELLING THE WORLD

CO-OP

A Novel of Living Together

By
UPTON SINCLAIR



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THE EIGHTY-FIVE CHARACTERS

In Order of their Appearance

CHARLIE DAY, Pipe citizen; ex-publicity man at salary too big to believe
Thomas Cullen, Pipe citizen; ex-brokerage manager, who gave his life
Pete Shaver, Pipe citizen; ex-thresherman from Texas; A.E.F. and bonus marcher
Joe Timmick, Pipe citizen; ex-wobbly, agin it all; tired radical who became a martyr
Len Saugus, Newly rich; upholder of the old regime
Mabel, His sister; also rich, but with different ideas
Jennie Gideon, Mabel's maid; Socialist and matchmaker
Genevieve Whiteing, Young matron of society
Freddie, Her husband, who played polo
Sigvald Soren, Ex-sailor, ex-convict, and builder of humanity
Reverend Myers, Pastor of church where co-op started; much relieved they did not bring bombs
Bill Mase, Accountant, old-time Socialist and co-operator
Scotty Adams, Reliable carpenter
Susie, His daughter, office worker
Jed Parsons, Mechanic
Jeremiah Mason, Old gardener, "unemployable" but worked miracles in fields
Mrs. Flanagan, Lot-owner, who saw a way to be of use
Brother Lawrence, Friend of the vegetables
Philosophilus, Printer and astrologer
Richard Atkins, Student
Strubb, Ex-filing clerk and "vagrant"
Dad Slempp, Pioneer; owned loft for men to live in; later got false teeth on "points"
Mrs. Emily Butters, Laundry worker

Mrs. Jane Pitter, Enemy of relief officials; got a divorce on "points" and turned "Red"

Mrs. Buttongall, Frail but sensible

Grace Megrue, Stenographer, who "outfainted" the relief people

Mr. Rendant, Baker, bald-headed and hard-working
Theophilus Fleming, President G.S.L. & P. Co.; had wealth and power, also a grim sense of humour

Mrs. Patricia Van Dyke Fleming, His wife, patroness of charity

George Reverdy Mills, Capitalist, who never got fooled

Harry Franz, Old Thee's manager

Cristy Jett, Share-cropper from Louisianny, who starved and sang his way to Californy

Mel, His wife, whose babies came "easy"

Bib, His oldest boy

Dink, His dog, who died a jackrabbit

Clem, His brother, country fiddler

Walter Leslie, Musician, teacher in co-op

Napoleon Bonaparte, Who revived St. Helena in California

John Cass, Doctor, head of medical section

Antonio Spadoni, Barber, who loved equality and got it

Sebastiano Gerardo, His employer, who made all the trouble he could

Ole Svenson, Truck driver, who picked up a passenger in the mountains one rainy night

Timothy Fetters, Old cobbler

Barney Bascom, Star reporter, who found scoops in the co-op

Sergeant Casey, Police detective, who wasn't so bad

Harry Simkin, Coal and wood, a hard guy to put anything over on

Angus McTeagle, Insurance and Loans, also producers' co-operatives, if he could run them all

Dan Riker, Ex-boxer and stevedore, assistant to McTeagle

Bumpy Jones, Another assistant

Jimmie Small, Emissary to bore from within

Mrs. Berry, Relief administrator

Ned Petticome, Self-pitying failure, easy mark for the borers

Val Harris, Chief accountant, who joined the malcontents

Jessie Taylor, Communist, member of sewing section

Mr. Harriman, Ex-engineer, single-taxer

Maisie Trent, Left her home and had a ride with two strange men, and found a husband

Mrs. Virginia Beverly Trent, Her mother, who also rode with two strange men along the same route as her daughter

Jake, }
Ben, } White slavers, who encountered their first failure
Bess, }

Leeza Svenson, Wife of Ole

Reverend Elias Prosser, Itinerant crusader

Mrs. Prosser, His wife, who followed him

J. Seymour Alding, President International Insurance Co.; multi-millionaire whose hobby was orchids and letting electricity do the work

Herbert, His son, with ideals of his own; he could not buck the Ku-Klux of high finance, but he got a wife out of the deal

Robert P. Stone, District Attorney, who took orders from above

Mrs. O'Brien, }
Mrs. Lashevich, } Who were evicted

Lawrence T. Peck, Garage owner, who died and came back to life, and it made him a "Red"

Dr. Price, Who rescued Larry

Jake Burrige, Mrs. Pitter's brother, Communist

Professor Michael Sperry, Taught philosophy in one college and started another

President Engstrom, Who fired Sperry

Peter Parley Snell, Of Parley's Pellets fame; fearful of revolution and made plans for safety

Weenie, His wife, ex-circus rider, who didn't take much stock in the revolution, but wanted her butler back

Henry Bodkin, Butler with English training, who advised his employers socially and dated eggs with purple ink

Mr. Allingham, President, Chamber of Commerce

Mrs. Gwennie Wattles, President, Wednesday Morning Club

Mr. Hulbert Osgood, Banker

Mr. G. T. Hallam, Polo-playing brewer

Mr. Ellis, New Deal official

Mrs. Sallie Page Thatcher, Of the White House set

Mr. Basil Harmon, Of the same

Mrs. Roosevelt, Who knew a good thing when she saw it

President Roosevelt, Who may provide a happy ending if and when

A FEW WORDS TO THE READER

A BOOKLET published in 1935 by the Division of Self-Help Co-operatives of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, lists one hundred and seventy-five self-help co-operatives in the state of California, as against seventy-five in all the other forty-seven states of the union. The California self-help co-operatives are found in eighty-five different cities and towns; and being a citizen of the state, a recent candidate for political office, I have visited most of these towns, and inspected or inquired into scores of the co-operatives. I have met hundreds of California co-operators: I have looked into their faces, shaken their hands, heard their stories, asked them questions. Nor is this a recent whim. Nearly twenty years ago I helped to promote the Pacific Co-operative League in California; also a local consumers' co-operative in my home city. So it has come about that my mind is stored with impressions of California co-operators.

All these impressions have been drawn upon for this story. It is a picture, not of one California city or town, but of a dozen; not of one "co-op," but of scores; not of one group of workers, but of an army of them. Inevitably, some man who has met me in a "co-op," and who happens to have black eyes, is going to recognize himself in a black-eyed character in this novel; the same for a golden-haired lady. There is no physical characteristic or mannerism, no life-story, tragic or amusing, which I could invent without causing some California co-operator to think that I mean him or her. I could not use one of the common Anglo-Saxon names—Smith, Jones, or Brown—Tom, Dick, or Harry—without the certainty of hitting many California co-operators. If I should call a character John Thomas Brown, there would be pretty sure to turn up such a person in the Unemployed Citizens' Exchange of Pacoima or the Self-Help Unit No. 257 of El Segundo.

So it is necessary for me to state explicitly: there are no real persons in this story; there are little bits of hundreds of real persons, which a creative imagination has endeavoured to fuse into something more real than reality; an interpretation of that which is, and a prophecy of that which is to be.

Two exceptions to this statement: First, the President of the United States and his wife, for whom I could not invent convincing substitutes. And second, an old friend of mine, Hjalmar Rutzebeck, of the Santa Barbara Co-operative, who permits me to use parts of his very interesting story. But I have taken away his perfectly good wife, and assigned to him a different wife—whose strange and terrifying experience was narrated to me by the wife of a well-known college professor. So, you see, it is all mixed up, and the only thing for you to do is to read without thinking of real persons. However, it is interesting to know that everything in this story did happen to someone; and that there are in the State of California a hundred and seventy-five organizations, doing the same kind of work and having the same kind of adventures as I have here portrayed.

BOOK I: 1932

CHAPTER I

PIPE CITY

I

As a place of residence for human beings, a piece of concrete sewer pipe, while still aboveground, and before it has become part of a sewer, has some virtues and some defects. It is durable, and requires no repairs. It is rainproof—at least until the rain has gathered on the ground. It provides plenty of ventilation. It will not be blown over by a “santa ana,” nor wrecked by the earthquakes which are common in California. Finally, it is impossible for an automobile to come crashing through the side of it—something which has been known to happen to frame and stucco houses along California highways.

On the other hand, it is rather difficult to close the two entrances to such a residence. You can draw a board cover or a sheet of tin up against the opening; but you cannot pull it close, otherwise it will fall over; and a gust of wind may take it away at the very time it is most needed. You cannot drive a nail into concrete—not unless you have money to buy a special kind of nail. The early dwellers in Pipe City suffered much discomfort, until some genius bethought himself to fasten a length of rope to each of the board covers or pieces of tin. When these ropes were drawn together and tied, there you were, safe and snug.

In the city of San Sebastian, California, was a concern which manufactured concrete sewer pipe, and this concern had a large quantity of pipe stored on a vacant tract; rows upon rows of unconnected pipe joints, each five feet in diameter and ten feet in length. They were near the waterfront, and the

railroad passed, and the tops of the freights, especially the gondolas, were crenellated with men and boys, riding here and riding there, anywhere that was a different place. The riders would see these pipes, shining in the sunlight, gay and festive with yellow underwear and blue shirts laid out to dry, and groups of men sitting about, smoking pipes and chatting. The riders would descend and make inquiries: "Hey, buddy, do the bulls let you alone here?" The answer being satisfactory, they would unsling their bundles and file a claim.

Only when the sun went down, and fog began to creep in from the bay, did they discover the defects of five-foot sewer-pipe as a residence for grown men. In the first place, you can't stand erect in it; and when you lie down, you discover that concrete is one of the chilliest substances invented. The nights are always cold in California, and one man could not sleep alone in Pipe City, unless he had more bedding than most wanderers carry. When you got yourself a sleeping-partner to warm you, you made the discovery that the tilt of the floor made it impossible to turn over without butting him in the ribs. When you tried sleeping, one at one end of the pipe and the other at the other end, you had to decide whether you would rather have your partner's feet in your shins, or have them in your face. From disagreements about this resulted many pummeling matches in the dark interiors of this city of forgotten men.

You might solve the problem by begging, borrowing, or stealing a tiny wood stove, and a couple of pieces of rusty pipe. This would establish you among the aristocracy of the settlement. You would set up your stove in the lee end of your home, and make it firm and snug; you would gather driftwood along the waterfront, and with stones pound or smash it into the right sizes; and then, when the sun went down, and the fogs stole in, you could crawl inside and spend a night in lonely solitude—alternately baked when your fire burned and shivering when it didn't.

But in the morning hunger would drive you forth; you would stand in the breadline for the requisite number of hours, and after you had filled your belly with thin soup, thin coffee and thick bread, you would come back and find your stove and stove-pipe gone. How were you going to find them in a city with so many hiding places? The history of international diplomacy proves that men who steal will also lie, and they

will fight to defend their stealings. Pipe City in the end was forced to establish a government and elect a "mayor" and a "policeman"; and presently it had all the phenomena of graft, politics, "Reds," revolutions.

The materialist interpretation of history was vindicated in this community; for it was the rigidity of sewer-pipe dimensions and the lack of heat-retaining qualities in concrete which governed the laws of hospitality in that unusual community. The prowler in the damp and chilly night would stop at an entrance and say: "Any room in there, buddy?"—and if it was an aristocratic place, possessing a central heating plant, he would hear a surly: "All full up." But if it was a place which depended upon human heat, he would hear the question: "You got any cooties on you?" If he answered: "No, but I got some smokes," he would hear, "Come in," and a scuffling of men moving up to make room.

The more there were in a pipe, of course, the warmer they all slept. You put yourself crosswise, and if you had anything soft you put it under the base of your spine; your head lay back against the rounding wall behind you, and your feet were braced against the rounding wall in front. If you tired of one position, you could slide back, and sit up; or you could slide farther down, and bend your knees at a sharper angle. You could not straighten your legs except by crawling over the legs of the others, and facing the wind and the rain outside.

One of the luxuries of life in Pipe City was a dry board, to keep your feet away from the concrete. Not all knew this—only those who had become permanents, and learned how pleasant it is to take off your shoes, and rub one foot against the other to warm them. Nearly everyone had matches, and either a pipe or cigarettes; when they struck a match, you saw four pairs, or sometimes five, of socked feet, or maybe of bare ones. You slept the night with men whose faces you had never seen, and whom you knew only as trouser-legs, socks and odours.

It was difficult to read in such a place, and few men tried it. But on cold nights they had to crawl in early; and then, huddled together, they talked. They talked about the scraps of news they had picked up in papers by the wayside; they talked about baseball scores, and later in the year, football; they talked about breadlines, missions, and other places to get

food; they talked about women and adventures with them; they talked about the races, and various kinds of gambling—few of which could be carried on inside a five-foot sewer pipe; they talked about politics, and how rotten it was; they talked about economics—why times had got so bad, and the chances of their getting better. More and more they were becoming interested in economics, for the depression was finishing its third year. They had been told that prosperity was just around the corner, but the corner seemed as far away as ever, and they were beginning to ask if it was a round-house.

II

"What started me down?" said Greysocks. "I can't be sure, but I always had the idea it was bubinga wood."

"What the dickens is that?" asked Blacksocks.

"The latest thing in interior decoration. If we had this pipe lined with bubinga wood, people would come from all over town to look at it, and we would be the snobs. I didn't believe in it, and that got me in bad with the president of the company."

"What started me down," said Blacksocks, "was that I believed in Steel. I kept on believing in it, and wouldn't let go."

"Stock market?" said Greysocks; and then to Stripesocks: "What did you believe in?"

"I believed in the war."

"Most of us fell for that. Were you wounded or gassed?"

"I was in the bonus army, and Hoover had me shot." He spat, emphatically; it was a ritual of the bonus marchers, when they named the President of their country.

The last fellow on the end was Nosocks; and the silence seemed to indicate that it was his turn. Said he: "My trouble was I believed in the workin' class."

"Wobbly?" asked Greysocks; and the other grunted his assent.

So they were properly introduced; and it was up to each of them in turn to entertain the company—the Thousand and One Californian Nights. "Tell us about—what was that wood?"

"Bubinga," repeated Greysocks. He was the end man on the left, a big fellow, one could tell by the amount of room he took up. He would forget his pipe while he was talking,

and when he relighted it, the next man got a glimpse of a lean face with high cheek-bones and a prominent nose.

"Ever hear of Honeycream soap?" he began. Oh, yes; they had walked or ridden the highways, and seen the signs; they had read the magazines, and knew the nationally advertised products of their country.

"You know the Honeycream girl, who brought beauty and charm to all the sex-starved males of America. I had her photographed in five hundred and twenty-eight different poses and costumes. She earned her living that way, until she became my wife."

The speaker had a deep, rather musical voice, with undertones of melancholy. It was evident that he had been what is known as a "winner." The others waited tactfully. They couldn't bring the Honeycream girl to mind—there were too many nationally advertised ladies; but they had a suffused sense of ineffable loveliness, stealing into their souls from the billboards and magazine pages.

"I held the post of publicity director to the Honeycream Soap Company," the narrator resumed. "I had an income of close to sixty thousand a year."

"Go on!" broke in Nosocks.

"I'm telling you," said the other, quietly.

"I've read about guys like that, but I never met one," said the wobbly, preparing to back down.

"No doubt there are others in Pipe City; and if so, they'll tell you about it. In the old days men used to brag about what they were making; now they brag about what they lost. They often exaggerate; but I had a contract that guaranteed me fifteen hundred a month, plus one-eighth of one per cent of all the increase in the company's business. My last monthly cheque was a little over forty-nine hundred dollars."

"I lay down," said Nosocks. "What does a guy do with pay like that?"

"We all had a hard time spending our pay in those days. The money poured in. We set aside three millions a year for advertising the Honeycream girl. It's an all-right soap, but of course what sold it was the name. We had modern factories—mass production—the Taylor system—several hundred thousand cakes a day, but we couldn't get enough. It hardly seemed reasonable that the stockholders should have all that money, because they didn't know what to do with it either, and

we were doing the work. We insisted that at least we should be housed according to our talents, and persuaded the directors to order the Honeycream building, a hundred and seven stories, and a tower with a stainless steel flagpole that was going to emulate Benjamin Franklin, and bring the lightning down from the clouds to run our air-conditioning plant.

"So came the question of how to decorate our offices; and somebody had told the president of the company about bubinga wood, which comes from Africa, and costs more than any other kind. The Honeycream girl and I thought we had ideas about interior decoration; we thought that Circassian walnut was lovely, and we argued for it. But you see, that is nothing but plain California eucalyptus, and it's cheap. Bubinga is less beautiful, but it costs so much, you can tell the visitors about it, and their eyes will pop open, and they will go off and talk about it, and buy more of your soap. As publicity director, it was my business to know that, but somehow I could never quite fit my job, I could never lose the last trace of my common sense."

"We all have some weakness, or we wouldn't be here," said Blacksocks. "What happened?"

"I don't know why presidents of big companies always have to be mutts; I suppose they are picked because they are heavy and solid, and can sit down on the other executives and keep them from fighting. Anyhow, our president insisted upon bubinga wood; and then he would gaze about his expensive offices, and be proud of himself—only he kept remembering the insulting things I had said about his wall panels. So I became a thorn in his thoughts. When the slump came, and everything began to go to hell, and a lot of fellows had to be let off—I was told that my contract would not be renewed. That's all."

"Didn't you have anything left?"

"Oh, a pile of things: a fine house in the suburbs, and a 'camp' on the coast of Maine, and a 'cabin' in Florida—only they were all mortgaged. I had a speedboat and three cars, not paid for. When I began to sell things to pay off my debts, I discovered that I had less than nothing. Also, I discovered that my wife wasn't as happy as she had been. When I learned that she had found a fellow who could take better care of her, I decided to go out and see America from the basement floor. That's my story."

III

There was a silence, punctuated only by the lighting of forgotten pipes. Nobody expressed sympathy—it was not the custom in Pipe City, where the darkness favoured impersonality. You listened, and it was like reading a story in *True Confessions*, or some other Macfadden publication. “I forgot to tell you my name,” said the speaker. “I have a lot of initials—C. E. W. Day. You can call me Charlie.” And then he added, “Now tell us about Steel.”

“I haven’t as much of a story as yours,” replied Black-socks. “My name is Thomas Cullen, and I was branch manager of a brokerage house in K.C. I didn’t have a big salary, but I had opportunity to know what was going to happen, and I used it. Three years ago, I figured I was worth a couple of hundred thousand. Then everything took a tumble, and I was hit; but you know how it was, we couldn’t realize it. I was an insider, and thought I couldn’t be fooled. I looked up the value of properties and assets back of an investment. I would say: ‘See here; the country’s got to have Steel; we’ve got to have buildings, and the nations are going on arming.’ I would argue with the customers, and a lot of them believed me.”

He was an earnest little man, intense, and with a high-pitched voice. The match-lights revealed a head nearly bald, a thin, care-lined face, and a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles. You could see how the customers had believed Thomas Cullen, and how he had believed himself.

“I would scrape some money together, and buy Steel; then, after a few months, it would take another tumble. I would wait another six months, to get over the shock, and then I would say: ‘Look at where Steel is now. It just can’t go any lower.’ I would buy again, and pretty soon the bottom would fall out of the market.”

“You had a family?”

“I had a wife; and when the firm went out of business, and we had to move into one room in a lodging house, she died. The doctors said it was heart trouble, but I knew it was grief. Mixed with shame, of course. We all take it so seriously.”

“Yeah, we oughta been bums at the start,” said Stripesocks.

"Tell us about the bonus march, and about Hoover."

"Don't say his name," replied Stripesocks. "There ain't room to spit in here."

"Tell it your own way," said Charlie Day, soothingly.

"Well, since we're interducin' ourselves, my name is Pete Shaver, and I was raised in Texas; my dad run a thrashin' outfit. That's husky work, you know, from dawn till dark, and it don't put no fat on you. But I stood it all right and it done me good; I seen a lot o' the country, travellin' with the outfit, campin' out. But the war come, and I enlisted at the start; I got my belly full—but still it was all right. I didn't have no kick. But when I come back, you know them hard times that hit the country right after the war; that got my old man, and he lost his rig and all his money—the farmers in our part was clean on their backs, and they ain't never got up."

"Go on," said the ex-publicity man, after a pause. Lighting his pipe, he took a look out of the corner of his eye, and saw a lean, weather-beaten face, with a sharp chin and an Adam's apple sticking out. He could see, because the ex-thresher was taller than the ex-broker, and was sitting up straight, like a partridge in a tree-branch startled by a noise.

"Well, after that, I was a wage-worker, and I never could get my head above water. My wife had to get a job, and that made me ashamed, just like Cullen here. Then come this bonus talk, and it listened just right to me. I says: 'Look here, I went overseas and done what I could for my country, and while I was gone these fat guys been rakin' in the dough. They got a cinch on everything; why shouldn't they come acrost?' I walked all the way to Washin'ton; I thought the President of this sweet land o' liberty would respect the men that had risked their lives overseas. But you know what he done—had us gassed and shot, even the women and children. There's jest one reason I ain't happy on the road like this, and that is I lost my vote, and I can't tell the bastard what I think of him next month."

"Listen at the poor scissorbill!" said Nosocks, his neighbour on the end. "What good'll it do you to vote against him? You'll get another guy that will treat you the same when he gets a chance. You think any politician's going to care about workin' stiffs like you an' me?"

They were off on a political argument; for Pete Shaver, the man from Texas, was a Democrat, and Roosevelt sounded good to him.

Charlie Day interrupted, with his quiet persuasive voice. "We haven't heard how you believe in the working class, and why you stopped."

"I ain't stopped," said Nosocks. "I just see I gotta wait. A lot more of 'em has got to have their skulls cracked. I still got a red card in my pocket, and I pay the price when the bulls hold me up." He was a pale, undernourished fellow, and his voice was bitter; he had a fresh scar on his cheek, as if he had recently been paying some "price."

"Go on," said the other; "tell us the story."

"My name is Joe, and I ain't got any initials. Well, I started in Seattle; run away from home when I was a kid. Old man was a boozefighter, and licked me, so I was always a rebel. I was only a kid when the war come, and I was just as keen to keep out of it as Texas here was to get in. I smuggled on to a ship to Central Ameriky, and I combed the beaches there, and looked at the lovely señoritas paradin' round the park on Sunday afternoon, the girls one way and the men the other. There is worms in the oranges down there, and if you eat them they kill you. I reckon I musta et half a one, fer I half died.

"But then my conscience began to work on me. I says: 'There's guys up home goin' to jail fer the workin' class, and you loafin' in the sun.' So I come back and helped to make a strike of the oil workers in Kansas, just after the war. I was one of the bunch of wobblies they indicted, and put in a revolv'in' tank, about forty of us, and every time they wanted to get one out to see his old mother or whatever it was, they had to screw the damn thing around, and it rattled and groaned and squawked on the hinges to bust your ears. Any you guys ever do a jolt?"

Apparently none had, for there was a silence.

"Well," continued Joe, "I done eight years, and it done me. They feed you mostly starch and cold grease, and your teeth come loose. Since I come out, I guess my nerve is gone; I'm what you call a tired radical. I hate the bloody system as much as ever, and when I run into a scissorbill like Texas here, I can't keep from shootin' off my mouth. But I ain't got much hope. I say, the poor stiffs is made to be meat fer

the slaughter-house; they'll follow any political bellwether that can blat loud enough about the forgotten man."

IV

They had their argument as to whether Roosevelt would or could do any better than Hoover. They discussed the plight of the country, and the chances of a man's "coming back." They were all of them close to forty, the deadline, after which hardly anyone in America could expect to get employment. Now, with a fresh crop of several million youngsters swarming into the labour market each year, what employer would take a man past his prime? In a hundred dwellings in Pipe City, and a million other makeshift shelters all over the United States, middle-aged men were discussing that question, and their souls were sick with fear. "We're through," they would say a million times a night in the sweet land of liberty.

Charlie Day told them how soap was made nowadays. The Honeycream concern had its factories scattered over the country, to save freight costs; and in each place it had a modern "straight-line" plant for turning out cakes of soap. The molten material was poured out of tanks three stories high, and run over icy rolls, and ground into chips, and pressed and moulded, and cut into lengths, hundreds of thousands of cakes of soap per day, all of the same quality, size and shape. Without a hand having to touch them, each cake was wrapped and sealed in a fancy paper, and packed in fancy cartons, with pictures of the Honeycream girl; these cartons were nailed up in wooden boxes, and labelled with stencilled addresses of the customers, and run out on an escalator to trucks or freight cars. All that was needed was a few men to keep the machines oiled, and to shift levers which determined how many cartons were to be in a box.

So the cost of making soap had been cut to one-third of what it used to be; and the number of workers the same. That was going on in every line of industry; in the packing plants which collected the animal fats, and in those which made the vegetable oils, the alkalis, the chemical perfumes and colouring substances; likewise in the plants where trucks were made, and the locomotives and freight cars and steel rails. Everywhere, under the pressure of remorseless competition, the masters of industry were perfecting processes and dispensing

with labour. The result was what you saw, ten million ex-workers, standing in breadlines, and sleeping in sewer pipes and caves and empty freight cars, in villages which they derisively called "Hoovervilles"—groups of hovels made of packing boxes and tarpaper and pieces of old tin beaten flat.

"I can't understand it," said Thomas Cullen, the conscientious ex-manager of a broker's office. "I always argued that the more machines we had, the more goods we'd turn out, and the better off everybody would be."

"Yeah, and look at you!" said Joe, the wobbly. "What's the use of all the goods, if the people ain't got money to buy them? Can't you see it's because the workers don't own the machines, and can't get the product?"

They argued Socialism, Syndicalism, Communism for a while. Joe had a clear-cut and simple programme: the workers were to organize, declare a general strike, seize the plants, and run them for their own benefit.

Charlie Day gave them some more inside news—this time about the killing powers which modern capitalism had created: machine guns which could mow down hundreds of people in a minute; three-inch guns, firing shrapnel several times per second; tanks that went forty miles an hour, and heavy enough to go through the wall of a building. The workers might imagine themselves safe inside the plant; but one of these engines would come crashing in amidst them, releasing gas which would kill everyone except the men in the tank.

"The police in every industrial centre know all about your programme, Joe, and they're practising every day to meet it. If you're too strong for them, there's the army—it can come in motor-trucks at sixty miles an hour, or in aeroplanes at two hundred. It can drop one gas bomb that will put your whole factory out of commission."

The wobbly was glum for a space, and then said, with a sort of growl: "What you comin' down among us guys fer? You know you ain't really one of us."

"If you mean that I could go back to my old world and beg a few handouts, you may be right. But it so happens that I'm sick of fair-weather friends. I said to myself: 'I'm out of work, and I'm going with the other out-of-works, and see what they're thinking and saying.' Anything wrong with that?"

"No; but what do you expect to get?"

"Some ideas. This much we start with: it's going to be a long time before the American people get out of this mess—before they know enough to begin. I'm right about that?"

"You know darn well you are."

"And meanwhile, here we are, stuck. What are we going to do all these years? Sleep in sewer pipes at night and stand in the breadline by day? We can't last it out."

"You may have luck—get a job as night watchman, or find a widow that owns a house."

"There's your rugged individualism! Every man for himself, and the best one gets the widow! But you're a class-conscious man, Joe. How are ten million workers going to get their food and shelter during the next ten years?"

"You tell me, by God!"

"Well, in the old days I used to rent my brains to the capitalists, to help them make money. Now I'm trying to use them for myself, and for you. Did you ever have a sixty-thousand-dollar brain at your service, Joe?"

"Go ahead, perfessor, and pull the rabbit out of the hat."

v

All publicity men have to study psychology. They learn that you cannot drive human beings, but have to understand them; find out the key ideas, the key phrases which lure or repel them. It was the wobbly formula that they had no leaders; every man was as good as every other man, and the working class and the employing class had nothing in common. Charlie was tactful, and declared that he would join the working class if he could.

He was just thinking out loud, he said. Joe and the others might perhaps help him to find a way out of this plight of unemployment. "Here we are with our labour power, and no way to apply it. We're outcasts from the system; and the question is, to find some sort of toe hold, a place to break in. It does us no good to form a union, because we can't exert pressure on the masters. We can't form a political party, because we've lost our homes and our votes. We have no money, therefore we're no longer consumers. So what have we?"

"Search me," said Pete Shaver.

"We've got to find some way to apply our labour power.

What I'm thinking is, wouldn't we stand a better chance working collectively than if we continue as individuals? "

"What could we do together that we couldn't do separately? " asked Cullen, the ex-broker's manager.

"I'm imagining some sort of organization for production and barter. I picked up the idea from an old Socialist; since then I've been going to the library, reading about what's been done. So long as we stand alone, we're just grains of dust that the wind blows this way and that. We wander away—you take one street and I take another—and a minute later we can never find each other again, except by accident. But if we form an organization, we have an address and anybody can find us."

"But who wants to find us, when we've got nothing? " asked Pete Shaver, the ex-thresher.

"I'm assuming that we'd begin to get something, and so people would take an interest in us."

"I don't get you. There's nothing for us to do. Why would there be any more if we got together? "

"Each of us can do something; maybe each can do several different things; but nobody knows us, or what we can do. But if we had an organization, and the organization stood responsible, we'd get a reputation for doing work and doing it well."

"You think there are jobs going begging? "

"You miss the point. There are millions of people who want things done, but they can't get them done—because they have no money. But if two of them need each other's services, they can exchange without any cash; and that kind of work can go on for ever, without regard to the depression."

"I can see that if you want your garage painted, and I want my car repaired, we can swap services. But I have no car, and you have no garage, so where do we start? What we need is food."

"Quite so; and there are thousands of tons of food rotting on the ground all around us, because it doesn't pay to gather and market it. But maybe the farmer needs his garage painted; and we go to him and say: 'Let us have part of your peach crop, and we will paint your garage.' "

"Where do we get the paint? "

"That's another deal. We go to a paint store and say: 'We are going to can some peaches, and we need some paint.

Will you trade with us? Or maybe you want your car repaired; or your teeth fixed—or what have you? ”

“ Just a minute,” said Thomas Cullen. “ You’re going too fast. You have to have equipment to can peaches.”

“ That’s one more problem we have to solve. Maybe one of our members has an oil stove, and another has a wash boiler, and we find someone who will give us empty jars in exchange for taking care of a lawn. What I see is that if we go to people and say we’re self-respecting men trying to get a start and take care of ourselves, we may find them willing to take some trouble and figure out how to make us useful. The first thing would be to get an organization, a name and a headquarters——”

“ Four men in a sewer pipe, looking for a headquarters! ” jeered the wobbly.

“ Stranger things have happened, Joe. It may be there’s somebody with an old warehouse he’s paying taxes on, and can’t rent, and he’d be glad to take a chance of getting ten dollars next month. It might even be he’s about to lose the place to a bank, but the bank will give him another month, if he can say he’s renting the place to a co-operative.”

“ Nice charitable bankers in this town! ”

“ The bankers in this town are like all the others in America; they’re loaded up with old houses they can’t use or sell, and they’d rather have a hope of ten dollars a month than take over another warehouse with a leaky roof, and windows for the kids to throw stones at. Thousands of banks are paying people to occupy residences nowadays; if we agreed to repair one, we might get it rent free.”

“ Buddy, it looks like the start of a grand new racket! ”

“ It might be made a racket, but if so it wouldn’t last long. If such an enterprise grows, it can only be because we carry out every promise; so presently people will be saying we’re a decent bunch, and worth helping. We’ll build up credit, which is exactly as good as cash in the modern world. Maybe you never thought about it, Joe, but ninety-eight per cent of all the business done in America is done on credit; if you had it, you could walk down the main street of this town, and put your hand on anything you wanted and walk off with it. Tom Cullen here knows that his brokerage business ran because the customers knew he would buy the securities they ordered, and deliver them promptly, and keep his accounts straight.

Pete Shaver knows that his father built his business by coming to thresh the wheat on the day he said he would, and making a clean job of it, and charging a fair percentage. That's the answer to the question why a co-op can get a start where an individual can't. A group of men doing useful things can build a reputation, and make something a hundred times stronger than any one man."

VI

Joe Nosocks had been battered about the world so much, and cheated so many times, that he no longer had it in him to trust any "smooth talker," nor any person who had had wealth, and presumably might be seeking to get it back. He nourished his unhappy soul upon the vision of a sudden collapse of the capitalist system, and he was not above thoughts of revenge upon those who had tortured and oppressed him. The slow patient process by which the ants and the bees construct their empires were not for his embittered soul. "I knew you had a rabbit in your hat!" he said.

"I'm thinking out loud, Joe," said the other, patiently. "What I decide depends on the reaction I get. If you fellows can't see it, then maybe I'm wrong. If you'd rather beg and starve along—all right, you haven't got the guts. If you don't trust my good faith—well then, clearly I'm not the right man to start a co-op."

"It listens all right to me," said the man from Texas. "I sure want to work again."

"God knows I do," said Tom Cullen. "What I can't see is, how to make the first move."

"That's the hardest part, of course. But here's a city full of people, and there's sure to be some that would help, if we can figure out a way to get to them."

"What way can you suggest?"

"First of all, a publicity man thinks of the newspapers."

"A fine break the capitalist press would give you!"—this from Joe.

"Why not? It's a live story; and we wouldn't hurt them, or any other business people in the city."

"You would, damn quick, if you got to producin'."

"They wouldn't figure we'd produce very much. And anyhow, they're worried about the unemployed—scared to

death that this country has got to start the dole, like England, and make them pay high income taxes. Remember, Joe, publicity is my business. If I can figure out a way to get my pants pressed, I can call on any editor and put over a story."

"Would you tell him you live in Pipe City?" asked Pete Shaver.

"No, we'd have to find another place to stay. There's something funny about the very idea of sewer pipes. And we don't want to draw the nuts, or the bums; we want real workers, people that have homes, and connections in the town. If I had the means, I'd work quietly—talk it over with this fellow and that, and get passed along from one group to another. But I don't know anybody in this place, and we haven't anything to live on; so I suppose we have to count on the newspapers."

They discussed various methods of making friends in a strange town. Thomas Cullen had been a member of the Methodist church back in "K.C." He might find one of these churches, in a poor quarter of the city, and call upon the pastor, and say that he was one of a group who were interested in a self-help co-operative, and ask him for names of men and women who were unemployed.

Joe, of course, flared up at this suggestion; but Charlie Day said it was fine. The virtues of sobriety and honesty which the churches taught would not be superfluous in a co-operative. It might even be that some pastor would let them have a room in which to meet and discuss their project. Also, they might try the "Y," both for members and for a meeting-place.

"I can see you guys are gonna get along fine!" exclaimed the wobbly. "You'll have an old clothes department, and every Christmas the church ladies will clean out their attics and let you come for the stuff! Now and then some preacher will come round and save your souls, and you'll have pie in the sky when you die. But I want mine right now, by God!"

"Of course, Joe," said Charlie. "But unfortunately you can't get it."

"At least I can tell the stiffs what's the matter with them."

"I thought you said you were a tired radical."

"Yeah, but it's rested me up listenin' to you, and I want to get into the fight again."

"Well, buddy, we'll have to count you out of our co-op."

"Count me out and leave me go to sleep." Joe folded his arms, and sighed ostentatiously, and closed his eyes.

Pete Shaver suggested another field to work in, the labour unions. They would need carpenters, mechanics, all sorts of skilled workers; and the union officials would know of many unemployed. Said Charlie: "Let's wait until we meet a union man who can introduce us."

"I'll introduce you at the wobbly hall," said Joe, without opening his eyes.

"I'd be glad to talk to them," replied the other. "I've a vague impression of having heard something about 'building the new society within the shell of the old.'"

Tom Cullen brought up the question of the social workers, the dispensers of charity, with whom they had to deal on the breadlines and in the shelters. What would be their attitude to the project of a "co-op"? This was the time when Mr. Hoover's system of "rugged individualism" was coming to be called "ragged." Private charity had cracked under the strain of increasing unemployment and destitution; the authorities of cities and counties and states were at their wits' end. Every patch of woodland had its "jungles," and every town its "Hoovervilles"—the cities had dozens of them on the outskirts. There was a hitchhiker to every mile of the vaunted highways of California, and the "wild children" of America were estimated at anywhere from a quarter of a million to a million—according to the political point of view of the estimator. In the midst of such economic paralysis and mass suffering, surely any charity worker would be glad to hear of people setting out to take care of themselves.

So argued Charlie Day; and Tom Cullen of the Methodist church agreed. Joe Nosocks commented: "Jees, what a bunch o' boobs! Don't you know those charity workers get their livin' out o' relief funds? If all the poor was to take care of themselves, the relief workers would have to go to work."

None of these four men had a watch, and did not know how late they argued; there was plenty of time, and plenty of problems to be debated—in the autumn of 1932, just before the elections in which rugged individualism was to receive its walking papers. Would Roosevelt remember the forgotten man, and what could he do if he remembered? What difference, if any, would there be between the "New Deal" and

the extremely rotten old one? Could anything be accomplished by politics, or was it just a trap for the workers? Was democracy dying, or was it preparing a new birth?

Men argued about these things everywhere, and disagreed violently, and found the world a confusing place. However else they might differ, they all agreed that it was hell for the losers, and that the man who could point the way out had not yet appeared on the horizon of the nation's life.

"I don't pretend to understand it," said the conscientious Tom Cullen. "But this seems certain, if we can find a way to help each other, and at the same time take care of ourselves, we'll be making a start towards a better day. God certainly didn't intend for us to starve to death."

"We can't get no worse off than we are," said Pete Shaver. "I'm ready to stick together and make a try."

"All right," said Charlie. "And does San Sebastian appeal to you as a place?"

"I've travelled enough," said Cullen, "to know there's no better place—and no worse."

"All right, we'll try to get our toe hold in San Sebastian. How does it seem to you, Joe?"

"It seems to me," said the wobbly, "a petty bourgeois old-clothes racket, and it gives me a pain in the neck. If you guys decide to vacate this piece of sewer pipe, I'll get in some real workers, that can understand direct action by and for the workin' class."

"We'll move in the morning," said Charlie. "Now let's have a sleep."

CHAPTER II

THE HIGHER-UPS

I

UPON the hill-tops and mountain slopes which half-circle the city of San Sebastian live those who can afford it. It costs money to drive your car up a slope, and more to build a private road to your estate, and to level off the land for your

building site, and your swimming-pool and tennis-court and Italian gardens, not to mention stables for your polo ponies and a landing field for your planes. This accounts for the fact that the poor do not live there, in spite of the attractive view and fresh sea breezes.

It is surprising what can be done in California by a combination of the arts of architect, landscapist, and irrigation engineer. When you circled over these heights in your plane, you might fancy you were over the hanging gardens of Babylon; it would be hard to convince yourself that these slopes, only a generation back, had been covered with sun-bleached foxtails, and, higher up, sagebrush, greasewood, and here and there a yucca, standing like a big yellow candle flame. Now you saw ornamental plants from every part of the globe; huge masses of purple bougainvillæa from Central America, or of wistaria from China; golden acacias from Africa, blue jacarandas from Brazil, scarlet plum trees from Japan. If you were privileged to drive over these estates, you might inspect trees loaded with grapefruits as large as your head, and chrysanthemums and roses by the acre; you would see parks with deer and buffalo, even a zebra; paddocks for Arabian stallions with pedigrees as long as a king's; polo ponies that drank from silver cups they had helped to win; blue-ribbon dogs that dined off gold-plate and had footmen to attend them, and trustees to manage the estates which had been willed them by fond mistresses.

Of course the owners of these estates, like everybody else in America, had been hit by the depression. Some had reduced the number of their gardeners, and were driving last year's cars, and spending their time at home, instead of visiting in the capitals of Europe, or exploring the islands of Galapagos and New Guinea. There had even been sad cases of old families who had had to give up their estates, and move into humble bungalows in the suburbs.

That was how it happened that the beautiful old Eldridge place became vacant, and the Saugus family got its chance to break into society. There had been talk on the part of friends of stepping in to save the place and protect the neighbourhood; but they delayed to act, and the banks put the property on the market, and the very first day it was advertised, in stepped Len Saugus and put down his cheque on the counter.

How the tongues of the gossips wagged! "Nothing but

a plain old rancher, my dear; they say he found a salt mine on his place—acres of salt just under the ground. Could you imagine that people use so much salt? The family has such an income, they don't know what to do with it. Freddie says they're making heavy investments, so of course he has to cultivate them, right now in these terrible times—will you come help me if I invite them to the house? "

Then, a few months later, another of the old families, the Tysons, became "involved," and Vinnie Tyson, one time tennis champion, shot himself, and another home came on the market. It stood in a sun-drenched valley, just below the estate which Len Saugus had acquired; it was called a "cottage," but was really quite a house, in the old California fashion, with double gallery along the front, upstairs and down. It had gardens, on a small scale but very lovely; and what should the younger of the Saugus sisters do but step in and buy it for herself. Of course, those people had no sensibilities, and didn't know or care that the former mistress of the place had been the dear friend of everyone in the neighbourhood; a fine pianist, her home had been a centre of musical culture—and now it was to be the castle of a salt princess!

Again the wagging of tongues! The tongue of Genevieve Whiteing, leader of the young matrons, and daughter of the light and power boss of San Sebastian: "My dear, what do you suppose she did? Just phoned down to Eisenberg's, and told them to come up and furnish the place! That much taste and discrimination! Of course they are putting off on her all the old junk they haven't been able to sell for years; even some curtains they made for Effie Marshall, and that she refused to take. I know, because it happens that my masseuse has a sister who works in Eisenberg's. They say Mabel Saugus doesn't get along with her brother, and decided to have a place of her own."

And then, even more startling—quite bewildering, in fact: "My dear, do you know what I hear about that Saugus woman? They say she's a Socialist! My maid knows her maid, and declares they are both Socialists—I mean, Mabel Saugus and her maid; the maid calls her 'Mabel.' Did you ever hear anything to equal that? My maid says that Mabel used to belong to the Socialist party, and may still—do you know if they have a Socialist party in San Sebastian? Anyhow, she has queer men coming there to the house; and you

know, people say they are all free lovers. It's a problem, because Freddie insists we can't snub them, for business reasons. I saw that Mabel woman in the stationer's yesterday; she was chatting with him about books—of course, he may be a Socialist too.—I suppose that sort of person would be, and she would invite him to her home. We certainly are living in funny times. Will you back me up if I invite her to dinner? "

Then, a week or two later, the climax: "My dear, you could never guess it in your life. I went to call on Mabel Saugus, in her home with the shiny new furniture. Yes, and the ghost of poor Vinnie Tyson whispering in my ear! I had tea with Mabel and the ghost. She was quite polite—I don't really believe all the gossip about her. But here's the joke—I invited her to dine and, do you know, she turned me down! Said she had reform activities which claimed all her energies. Imagine being snubbed by the Saugus family! I suppose I'm just the idle rich to her, and haven't anything to talk about that would interest a high-brow intellectual. Or do you suppose she can have heard about Freddie's financial difficulties? Really, my dear, I don't know what is going to become of us if this business of banks closing down doesn't stop! Have you heard what they say about the Merchants' National? "

II

Mabel Saugus sat in the drawing-room of her new home—decorations by S. Eisenberg Department Store. She sat in an overstuffed chair upholstered with red and purple figured silk. It did not "go with" the other chairs, nor the rugs nor the draperies, and Mabel had been uneasily conscious of this fact the first time she entered the room. But it was a comfortable chair to sit in, and had a lamp stand beside it, so now she had forgotten about it, and was reading an article in the *Nation*.

This article told how a group of men attempting to organize the walnut pickers in California had been taken away by a group of "vigilantes," watched by a couple of motor-cycle policemen, and beaten almost to the point of death, and left far out in the desert. The reading of the article left Mabel troubled in her mind—not because the furniture in her home was not right, but because she could not be sure if she had the right to have any furniture. Relatives and friends pulled at her, and it had seemed the easiest way to do the sort of thing

they expected; but she would never be entirely happy in that home, nor anywhere.

She was a woman of between twenty-five and thirty; tall, and rather too lean. She had reddish hair, an honest, kind face, a straightforward manner, and no subtleties or what is called "charm." Her voice was unfortunate; it was a little too loud, and had a shrill quality when she became the slightest bit moved by laughter or any other emotion. Her forefathers had acquired this voice calling hogs in Iowa, and had brought it with them to California in a covered wagon. Also they had brought the honesty and the common sense, but they had never needed "charm" nor missed it.

Mabel was expecting company to dinner, and had put on one of her new dresses, also purchased at Eisenberg's—for the reason that it was hard to park on the main street, and easier to get all the shopping over with at once. The dress was of pale blue chiffon, and had been planned for someone younger and gayer looking, and surely not one with reddish hair; but Mabel did not know that. Her thoughts had been on the men who had been beaten nearly to death for trying to organize agricultural workers to demand a living wage. She knew one of the men, and had given him some money.

Into the drawing-room came the one servant who was doing the work of this home, a large and capable woman, Jennie Gideon; a bit older than Mabel, with a broad face, rosy cheeks, a friendly smile, and a decided manner. That afternoon she had been out in the garden, and had picked a snow-white camellia, and now with a little gold pin she gently but firmly fastened it in her mistress's hair. "There, now," she said, and stood off and admired the effect. "That lights you up a bit. You must learn to think about your looks, now you've become a lady."

"But, Jennie, I thought it was a married man you were bringing to meet me."

"So it is; but he will go off and talk about you; and I'm trying to improve your reputation."

"My family has given me up for lost; but you still have hopes!"

"I know how it is. The men think you are fine and true, and they pay you the compliment of talking to you as if you were a man; but then they go off and take some other girl to the dance."

"You'd be surprised, Jennie, how many invitations I have had of late. Invitations to marry, even without being tried out at dances!"

"I know; there'll be plenty of rascals after your money."

"Not only rascals, Jennie. It's the thing which has surprised me most—how many of the radical men want to marry me. Intellectuals, and men I thought had importance; they hardly saw me in the old days—but the moment they heard about the salt mine, they discovered they were in love with me."

"Well, you know, I never did have much use for men; and it don't change them so much to give them a few radical notions. But the right one may come along some day."

"The right one is always in love with somebody else, Jennie. Or else he doesn't see me."

"That's why I say you better have your flag up when he passes."

Jennie Gideon called her employer by her first name because they had gone to school together when they were children. They had lived on neighbouring ranches, and Jennie's father had been an old-time Socialist. Now Jennie was a member of the entertainment committee of the Socialist local of San Sebastian, and after working all week, she went down every Saturday evening and helped prepare a "bean supper," and served it to a hundred sympathizers, including her employer.

III

"How do you want me to serve the roast, Mabel?"

"Do whatever way is easiest for you, Jennie. I'm sure you know more than I do about what is proper."

"Well, some like to carve, and some like it attended to outside, and some on the buffet."

"I don't know anything about carving, Jennie, and I don't know whether your friend does; so perhaps you better bring it in on our plates."

"By the way, your brother called up just before you came in. He wanted to know who was coming to dinner. He seemed peeved about it."

"It will take him a while to get used to my having my own home."

"I want you to know, Mabel, that no matter what he says, I'll always be polite to him. I've lived in a lot of families, you know, and been used to all sorts of difficulties."

"Thank you, Jennie. That will help me."

The doorbell rang, and Jennie answered, and came into the room with the expected guest. "This is Comrade Soren, Comrade Mabel." She waited until they had shaken hands, and then went back to her duties in the kitchen.

"It was very kind of you to come, Mr. Soren," said Mabel. "Won't you sit down, please?"

Sigvald Soren looked around him. He always had to do that, for the chair he sat in had to be bigger than the ordinary one. He stood six feet, and both the other ways in proportion. His chest was like a barrel, and his arms were powerful. He was an outdoor man, and just now unemployed, so none of him was fat. In his youth he had had even redder hair than Mabel Saugus, but now it was getting thin on top. But he still had dimpled cheeks, and a kind, rather quizzical smile, with a lot of wrinkles. With his size this produced a sort of comical effect, like an overgrown cherub.

"I'm very glad to be here, Miss Saugus," he said. "I have heard about you, and want very much to talk to you." His voice was gentle, and warm in tone.

They began talking right away, about the men who had been beaten, and the spread of this kind of brutality, and did it mean that Fascism was coming to California. This wasn't exactly what you would call an appetizing conversation, so it was well that Jennie came into the room at once, bringing the *hors-d'œuvre*. "Sig" Soren took a tiny little cracker with some fish paste on it, and when Jennie insisted that it was proper, he took in the other hand a tiny little sausage on a toothpick. He put these into his mouth one after another, and it was like Gulliver being fed by the Lilliputians.

But when they went into the dining-room and sat at table, Comrade Jennie was in position to take proper care of a hungry man. She knew a great number of them these days. She put four generous slices of roast lamb on his plate to start with; and when she passed the baked potatoes, she did not leave it to his modest nature to select one, but with her own hands she took the biggest and laid it on his plate—this of course in defiance of the regulations prescribed by Miss Emily Post.

"Eat it, skin and all, Comrade Soren," she remarked; and no one would need to consult a book of etiquette to know that this deprived the dinner party of all "tone." But poor Sig didn't know the difference, and proceeded to grasp his fork as if it had been a dagger, and to cut the potato up into chunks with powerful strokes of his knife.

IV

But hardly had the visitor got the first morsel of dinner between his teeth before he paused, and with his mouth still half open and his four-pronged dagger poised in air, he gazed at an apparition which had suddenly appeared in the doorway of the dining-room. A man had let himself in at the front door, and now stood staring at the dinner party, with a face full of menace. He was a rather tall man in middle years, with leather-tanned skin, prominent teeth, and large ears. He was the kind of man who would never look well-dressed, no matter how much he might spend on his clothes. Just now he was much excited, and burst abruptly into the conversation. "Mabel, who is this man?"

The hostess, startled, half rose from her chair; but before she could speak the other rushed on: "I want to know, is this man Sigvald Soren?"

"Now, Len——" Mabel started to expostulate, but got no further.

"Please be so good as to answer me! Are you aware of the fact that this man is a jailbird?"

"I don't know——"

"Of course you don't know; but I know, and I'm not going to have ex-convicts sponging on my sister."

"I beg you, Len——"

"I want you to answer me. Did you know this fact?"

"I have many friends who have been in jail, Len."

"Oh, but this is not one of your political prisoners, as you call them. This one is a burglar. Answer me, sir—is that true?"

Sig Soren didn't know whether he was supposed to answer or not; but he gave a mighty gulp and got the hot potato down, in the event that he might need to speak. However, Mabel moved over and put herself between her brother and her guest.

"Len, you have not been introduced to my guest, and you

will not be. Who he is and what he is is a matter between him and me."

"Oh! And I'm supposed to sit back and see my sister exploited and preyed on by a man with a jail record! . And a Commoonist conspirator!" Mr. Saugus accented this bad name on the second syllable, but they knew what he meant. "A fellow who is trying to bring riot and revolution in America!"

"I am quite sure you are mistaken there. Mr. Soren is a Socialist and a pacifist like myself."

"Socialist and pacifist, hey? The usual Commoonist camouflagge. Ask him if his wife isn't a member of the Commoonist party, and if his father-in-law isn't an organizer for the Commoonists. Answer me!" he insisted, his voice growing shrill. "Is it true, or isn't it?"

"You seem to have taken a lot of trouble to find out about my guest, Len."

"Oh, we keep track of them! We have sources of information, believe me! We're not going to let Roossian conspirators take possession of our country—not without a fight. I can call up and find out about any one of them in five minutes—and it'll all be the truth, they won't deny it."

"Yes, Len, I can understand that the Better America Federation gives you some service for the money they get from you—"

"I give money to protect the constitootion of this country, and our rights to the property we have earned. But you give yours to scallywags and demmygogs—people that come and impose on your good nature and rob you. I want this fellow to know that if I ketch him in my sister's home again, I'll smash his jaw."

Sig Soren sat motionless in his chair, with his very good dinner growing cold on his plate. He had never read any books on etiquette, and had no idea whether to go on eating or what. He decided that it was less provocative to do nothing, so he closed his eyes—and involuntarily hunched his shoulders a trifle.

But Mabel Saugus, whose ancestors had fought Indians and bad men, as well as busting sod and splitting rails, took a step towards her brother. "Len, give me the key to this house."

"What?" demanded the other, taken aback.

"I have my home, and I intend to have the privacy of it, and never again will you enter it to insult my friends. Give me the key."

"You know I'm the trustee of father's estate, and it would break his heart if he knew the kind of people you are supporting."

"You are the trustee of the estate, but you are not my guardian, Len."

"I'll go to court and become your guardian. I'll have you declared incompetent to handle money."

"All right, do that if you can. But meanwhile you are not to enter my home without my consent. Give me the key."

"I'll not do it."

"Very well, you can put me to the expense of calling a locksmith and having the locks altered. And meanwhile, you will let me and my guests alone. Now please go."

Poor Len Saugus, ranchman suddenly become leading citizen—he tried to live up to his new role, but his bluff was easily called. "Mabel," he began to plead, "you are breaking your sister's heart! You are disgracing our family before the world——"

"We have said all there is to say on the subject, Len. You will have to make up your mind that I am an adult person, and my reputation is my own, and I have a right to do what I please with it. Now please go."

"Mabel, won't you realize about this man? Ask him yourself——"

"Maybe I will ask him, but it won't be while you are here. You have subjected me to shame and embarrassment, and you are making me ill. I ask you to do one thing, which is to go home without another word."

Len Saugus threw up his hands. "My God, my God, all right! We have to give you up. You are no sister of mine—understand, I'm going to tell the world—I renounce you, I wash my hands of you, and your jailbirds and sabotaygers and camouflaged Commoonists——" All this as the baffled patriot was making his way to the front door. His last act was to throw the key to the floor, and slam the door behind him.

V

"Mr. Soren," said Mabel, with a trace of tears in her eyes, "I can't tell you how sorry I am——"

"Please don't say a word, Miss Saugus. Believe me, it seems much worse to you than it does to me! I have knocked about the world, and been in all sorts of places, including jails, as your brother says. I'm quite used to being called names—a lot worse ones than you ever heard. I've even been in fights."

"It was kind of you not to get into a fight this time."

"I've had practice at keeping out. I have to be careful, because, you see, I'm too strong; if I hit a man I'm apt to do him serious damage. Fighting is no fun when it's like that."

"No," said Mabel, smiling in spite of herself, "I suppose not."

"I know you're all unstrung," continued Sig. "I wish you'd forget it as quick as me. I'll tell you about my being in jail; and about my father-in-law and Communism—it beats the devil what those fellows find out."

"Wait and tell me after dinner, Comrade Soren. I know it's all got cold——"

"Oh, please—if you only knew how little difference that makes when you're hungry! I've et it froze, many a time. It makes plenty heat inside."

"All right then, please eat. It will make me happy." Wiping the tears from her eyes, Mabel Saugus took up her knife and fork and began pretending to put food into her mouth, in order to make her hungry guest feel more at home. Jennie, who had come in during the fracas and stood by prepared for action if necessary, now watched until Sig had disposed of the four slices of lamb, and then brought him in a fresh plate with four more slices on it, and another potato and some more green beans. Without a word, she took the old plate, and put the new one in front of the guest; he decided that this must be one of the new fashions whereby the rich demonstrate their abundance, and he started all over again.

Later, when they returned to the drawing-room, Sig Soren told his hostess the story of his life. He had been a sailor in his youth; then in the army, and then a gold prospector in Alaska. Luck had not come his way, and he had found him-

self stranded in the Yukon, with winter coming on. It is the practice of the Canadian police to put all moneyless men on the woodpile for the winter, and Sig had had a hard time escaping them; back in the American territory, he had been no better off, half starved and half frozen. Finally, one desperate night, he had broken into the back of a grocery, and made off with a sack of food.

"They caught me, of course," he said. "I'm not clever enough to make a good burglar. I near went crazy in jail—me, an outdoor man. And besides, I had a girl waiting for me down in Seattle. I thought if I got to her I'd be all right. So I broke out; and they didn't follow me, because I went a way they thought no man could travel and live—that is, over a glacier. I wore my shoes to ribbons, and I come very near to perishing—I was delirious part of that terrible journey. But I got back over the mountains, and met some friendly Indians and lived with them for a while, and then with a trapper. But when the spring come, they caught me again; that country wasn't big enough to hide a red-headed Dane my size. They brought me back—and again I broke out in a few weeks, and had more hardships; I look back on those days and wonder how I ever survived them.

"But in the end they had me in the Federal prison. The judge was decent, he only give me fifteen months, if I would promise to stay. I had books to read; I really began my education in that prison. And the girl, she was still waiting for me; so I stood it. When I got out I worked for a while in a coal mine, a dreadful time; I was near caught in a cave-in, and helped to dig out the dead bodies of two of my buddies. Then I decided to go to homesteading—that was on account of the girl. I had some luck, I got a lot of salmon, and made money, and so I got a start."

"Did the girl marry you?" asked Mabel.

"She's my wife now. We farmed it in Alaska. It was a hard life, but we won out. You should have seen me in those days, Miss Saugus; I let my beard grow, and it was bushy and red—I was the grandson of all the Vikings."

"Maybe you are that in reality."

"I suppose so. They gave me plenty of strength, and many a time I needed it. Well, to get on with the story, we had four children, and when they was old enough to go to school, we no longer wanted to stay in that wild place, so we

come to California, to the place where my wife's family live. I ran a trucking business, and we managed to get along—until this depression. That's my story, Miss Saugus; what I done was bad enough, but it was twenty years and more ago, so I figure I have lived it down."

"I think so," said Mabel. "And we won't ask my brother and his Better Americans."

VI

She began to question him about his ideas. "Is it true that your wife and her father are Communists?"

"It is. I don't know if you know the Communists, Miss Saugus—"

"Yes, I have friends among them."

"Well, you either accept their formula or you don't; and in the latter case you're a Social Fascist; you're betraying the workers, leading them into a trap; you're an agent of the capitalist class—or else you're a dumb fool, that hasn't sense enough to know what he's doing. My father-in-law has got one idea firmly fixed—that what happened in Russia is going to happen everywhere else in the world, and exactly that way. And you see, he had my wife's mind a long time before I did; he has it now. So finally, I said to myself: 'Look here, Sig, you're in the way; you can't do anything but start a wrangle.' You see, the old man has a ranch, and they get along. The children are grown up, and in high school. They can't agree with both their parents at once."

Sig Soren asked if he was boring her. When she answered no, he told her the conclusions he had come to about human affairs. He had always called himself a Socialist, but he didn't set much store by labels. "Whatever has to get done, I want it done peaceful; I've seen enough violence and cruelty to last me a whole life. We can learn a lot about economics from Russia, but nothing about politics, because our people is so different, and the conditions too."

Mabel said that she had been trying to help the Socialists, but she was dissatisfied because she felt they were not getting anywhere.

"The American people won't take it under the label," replied Sig. "They got it fixed in their minds that it's a

foreign notion, and it's atheistic, and all mixed up with free love, and drinking beer, and whatnot."

They discussed what could be done; and Soren, the Dane, told about conditions in his country. They hadn't ended poverty, but at least they had prevented the gross inequalities one saw in America; they had wiped out the malnutrition of the children. They had done it very largely by the spread of co-operation.

"That is something the people can do for themselves, Miss Saugus, and right away. Up to now the American people haven't been willing to bother with co-operatives; they could make money too easy. But things is changing fast now. I talk about co ops wherever I go, and I find that people want to know. The thing is starting up all over; it seems new, but there's lots of old-timers that have been through it."

He pointed out what America was losing by mass unemployment. If each worker could create two thousand dollars of wealth in a year, that was twenty billion lost each year, or sixty billion for the depression—as much as the whole income of the American people for a year. "We've got these millions of unemployed with us from now on, Miss Saugus; they'll never work for the profit system. But they can work for themselves—all they need is somebody to show them how, and help them get a start. The land is here, and the machines; if they start producing, they can trade for other things with other groups."

"How would you start, Mr. Soren?"

"I have a few contacts with people in this town, mostly workers, who would be interested. I would get the more intelligent ones together, to talk the thing over, and then form an organization and go to work."

Jennie had come in, having been invited by her mistress. She took a seat and listened quietly for a bit, while her friend explained the details about a self-help co-operative and how it could operate. Finally she said: "There are some people already making a start. There was a piece about it in the paper this morning."

She got the paper and read the item aloud: a group of unemployed men who wanted to form a self-help co-operative were meeting in the parish room of Grace Methodist Church the following evening. Their leader was C. E. W. Day, well-

known publicity man from the East, who had been making a study of co-operative forms of economy, both in America and abroad.

The interview went into detail concerning the project and the theories on which it was based. Mr. Day declared that the unemployed workers of San Sebastian had within themselves resources enough to overcome the depression. There was no need of charity, either public or private, for those who were physically able to work; nor did the employing class have anything to fear from a project which would take the unemployed off the backs of the taxpayers and make them self-sustaining. Those who wished to know how this could be done were invited to meet Mr. Day and his group at the church.

"There you are," said Sig Soren. "That fellow's got the idea. Let's go and see what they do."

"I'll be glad to go," said Mabel. "If they are people who really have a chance to make a success of it, I'll help them get a start. How much would it take?"

"I don't know, Miss Saugus, it depends on how many there are, and what kind of start they make. The first item is rent; they need some sort of old building—a warehouse would do, because they would fix it up themselves. It would depend on how much fixing it needed; and what sort of work they were starting, and what tools they needed, and who had any to put in. You can't tell until you try."

"I'll come and listen to them, and I won't say anything till I've made up my mind—or until you've made up yours. If it seems worth while, I'll pay for their rent for the first few months. What will they live on meanwhile?"

"How are they living now? Many of them are probably getting charity relief; if they have no homes, they are eating at the breadlines. If they go to work in a co-op, that should not cut them off from charity—certainly not until they are actually producing."

"And what are you going to live on, Mr. Soren?"

"That's a problem I don't worry about; I always manage to get along. There's a trick that I work every Christmas—I take a contract with some of the big department stores to furnish them Christmas trees; I go up into the mountains and cut a few thousand of them and lug them out on my back. I have managed to make a thousand dollars each year, and that lasts me quite a while."

"But if you do that, you won't be able to help start the co-op."

"I know; but I've seldom been able to do what I wanted in this world."

"Suppose I were to give you fifty dollars a month, say for six months—would you rather stay here and help start a co-op in San Sebastian?"

Sig's cherub face lighted up like one of his Christmas trees. "Oh, Miss Saugus! That is too much! I couldn't let you do that!"

"Of course you could, if it's for a cause. Anything I gave would have to go to somebody; and a salary for a manager is as important as anything. Poor people making a start like this would not be able to pay salaries."

"No, the manager has to take pot-luck with the rest. Of course what I didn't need I would put into the co-op, anyway."

"Well, you must have enough to eat, and to have your time free, so that you can be thinking about the problems of the group, and not of your own. It happens that I have some money I haven't earned, and I can't rest unless I am trying to do something useful with it. It's nowhere near as much as people suppose, but it's enough to help in the way I suggest."

"It's extremely kind of you, Miss Saugus, and I won't say no, because the fact is, I'm just crazy with this idea of doing something, instead of sitting by and watching people starve, or else live on charity, which ruins them so they can never work again, or be any good to anybody."

"You go to that meeting to-morrow evening and see what you think of it; I'll go separately, with some woman friend—I don't want to take part in it openly, at least not until I am satisfied that it's worth while. But you look at me, and I'll give you a signal, and if I do, you tell them that you know someone who will pay their first six months' rent, and stand for other expenses up to two hundred dollars, to help them get going."

"Well, that might mean all the difference between success and failure—or no start at all. A group of poor people can make two hundred dollars go a long way. The problem will be to use it to get a start at production, instead of having to use it to keep alive while they talk about how and where to make a start."

"I know. I've watched the workers trying to function, and I've learned what a tremendous lot of talking it takes."

"But not so much now, Miss Saugus. People is really in trouble, and they want to get something done. What is needed is leadership, to show them the way."

"You be the leader, Mr. Soren."

"That's another thing you can't decide in advance," said Sig, with a rueful smile. "There may be other men that has the idea of being leaders. There may be some that won't be interested unless they can be leaders. We'll have to do our best with whatever material turns up. Anyhow, we're going to have a co-op in San Sebastian! "

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST STEP

I

THE "assembly room" of Grace Methodist Church was large and bare, with smooth white plaster walls and brown varnished pillars. At eight o'clock in the evening some fifty or sixty persons were gathered to discuss the proposed new "co-op." The pastor—"Reverend Myers," as he was called—was a smooth-faced, middle-aged gentleman, well filled out, with a ready, professional smile, and perhaps a touch of anxiety for this occasion. His church had adopted a social programme of decidedly radical trend, and Reverend Myers felt called upon to support any movement in the direction of "a new social order"; but he didn't know much about these unemployed men who had come to him, and he hoped they were not going to give vent to provocative utterances. By way of protection the pastor had invited several members of his church whom he knew to be interested in social problems.

The rest were strangers to him, and for the most part to one another. They were people who had read in the paper about the new project, and had come to see if it had anything to offer them. For the most part they were middle-aged or

elderly folk, to whom the existing system offered no hope. The young people of America were still out looking for jobs; or they were being kept in school, a respectable form of unemployment; or they had taken to the road, and made up the army of "wild children," half a million strong and still growing. But the middle-aged and elderly had begun to realize that there would be no more work for them in the profit system; they were ready for any effort, however pitiful and ill-paid, to make work for themselves.

There were some who had been following the new trade known as "apple selling"; standing all day on a central street corner, holding out in the hand a shiny red or yellow apple. The charity agencies would give you a few of these, and if you could find soft-hearted people to pay you five cents each for them, you and your loved ones could eat something besides apples. At any rate the police did not arrest you for begging, and you served an educational purpose, by reminding the well-to-do classes that they had not yet solved the problem of distribution in America.

There were others who, if they had not come to this church meeting, would have been standing in line at the side door of a bakery, waiting for the distribution of stale bread. Or they would have been in the alleys, raking in the garbage cans of the fashionable hotels and restaurants, where quantities of rich food were thrown away. In spite of this richness, however, they were lean and undernourished; there were few rosy or stout persons in the audience.

But hungry as they might be, most of them still had places to stay in; and in those places they had a best suit of clothes, for churchgoing and such occasions. The men had got it out and brushed it, and shined their shoes, and plastered their hair down. The women had put on some bit of finery which reminded them of better times; and now they were sitting still and straight, not looking about much, but keeping their eyes on the platform, waiting for whatever might be dealt out to them.

Reverend Myers made a little speech, stating that he placed the room at their disposal, and they were welcome. The churches were deeply concerned about the troubles of the unemployed, and he hoped that something constructive and lasting might come out of this gathering. He introduced Mr. C. E. W. Day, a former publicity director, one of the group

of men who had this idea of starting a co-operative, and would explain the plan.

Charlie Day came forward. He had had his pants pressed, and if they were shiny in the seat this did not show, nor did the fact that his collar and cuffs were slightly frayed. He was a well-built and vigorous-appearing man, used to giving "pep talks" to company salesmen, so he impressed these forlorn people, eager for leadership. He set forth the theory of "self-help." This spell of "hard times" was caused, not by scarcity of anything, but by abundance of everything; there was plenty of food, clothing, and shelter, and the means of producing more; the trouble was that the workers didn't own the product, nor the means of producing, and had no money to buy or to exchange. It was a question of creating a new method by direct barter; also a new form of credit, the confidence of the community in a group of men and women who were willing and able to work, and would keep their promises and agreements.

The speaker went into details. They would form an organization in which all would be partners, on a basis of equal sharing in its benefits; they would build something more powerful than any one of them could alone, and which would protect them all. How far they could get with it would depend upon the amount of solidarity they could develop, and the collective intelligence they displayed in meeting their daily problems. They might get some help from outside, but they must learn to depend upon their own efforts; they would build a society of workers, not of beggars, and they should make the rule at the outset to give a return for everything they got. This might make things harder at the start, but it was the only way to build credit, the main asset they sought to create.

"We go to the farmer who has food," said Day. "We don't ask him to feed us free; we ask him to think of some kind of work which he needs, and which we can do for him. If we do that work well, that farmer is ready to trade with us in future; if he doesn't need any more work at once, he will take a credit, and have the right to call on us. Our problem is to make hundreds of contacts like that, and in every case make a friend, and so increase our power."

II

The speaker called for discussion of the project, and asked that each introduce himself at the outset, giving his name, and the kind of work he could do, and anything else he cared to state about his circumstances and needs. If they were going ahead with the project, they would need to name committees, and the quicker they got acquainted, the faster they could progress.

A man in the front row stood up. He was tall and slender, with the face of a student, a little grey moustache, and silver hair pushed back from his forehead and behind his ears. "My name is Bill Mase," said he, "and I am an accountant. I came up here in front because I belong where anybody is trying to co-operate. I'm an old-timer, and I have lived in every colony I could find. I was a young fellow in Ruskin, Tennessee, in the nineties. Maybe nobody here ever heard of it, but it was a big colony, and it ran for some years. I was one of the founders of Llano, here in California, and I moved with it to Newllano, in Louisiana. No matter how much trouble we have, we old Socialists never lose the dream that some day human beings will learn to co-operate, instead of fighting each other. I can tell you it won't be so easy as it may sound on paper; you'll quarrel with each other, and split up, and you'll have all kinds of trouble; but the time is ripe for a change—we workers have got to learn to stick together, or else we're all stuck separately. I know a lot of things you shouldn't do, and maybe I can keep you from trying to do a few of them. That's Bill Mase, co-operator."

There was a trace of applause. They were glad to know there was someone among them who had had experience with these strange matters. They were not too much concerned as to troubles they were going to make for themselves—they had so many troubles that other people were making for them right now!

A man got up in the middle of the room; stoop-shouldered, with a care-lined face and brown hair half gone on top. "My name is Scotty Adams," he said; "I'm a carpenter. I can build you anything from a cabinet to a house. There is my wife, and my daughter Susie, a stenographer, and we have been out of work for three years. First the bank failed and

took our savings. We put a mortgage on our home, and we lived on that for a year or more. Now the bank lets us stay in the house because they don't know what else to do with it. We took a boarder to help out—Jed Parsons here, a good mechanic, maybe he'll speak for himself. Now he's out of work. We have sold most everything we own, a bit at a time, to keep alive. The gas company and the light company have shut us off, so we live in the house in the cold and the dark. We haven't took a cent of relief yet—you know how it is, a man puts off till the last moment. All I can say is, if you can figure a way to get my tools out of the pawnshop, you can have any sort of work a carpenter can do; and Susie is a good office worker—if you can get an office, and a pencil and a notebook."

A man stood up in the back of the hall, and there was a rustle as people turned to look at him. He was tall and lean, with a long, thin face, having a strange kind of greyish-yellow colour. He wore a faded black suit which had apparently been made for a smaller man, and as he gesticulated his sleeves went half-way up to his elbows. His voice was husky, and trembling with intensity.

"My name is Jeremiah Mason. I am just turned seventy, but I am as good a man as I ever was. They have starved me out, and I went last week to the relief people. I didn't go to beg; I went to ask them to find work for a man that has been a gardener since he was ten years old. They looked me over and asked a lot of fool questions, and then gave me a card showing that I was classified as 'unemployable.' Me unemployable! I would have felt better if they had gave me a free ticket to a funeral parlour. 'What? Unemployable?' I says. 'I know how to grow anything that ever grew in California. I have fed a hundred people with my labour all my life, and I never knew so much about gardening as I do right now.' But they wouldn't listen to me; I had to pass on and stop blocking the line. So I have a ticket that entitles me and my old woman to a basket of groceries and nine and a half pounds of potatoes every week. How do you suppose they get that? How can they be sure we couldn't live on nine pounds? "

There was angry laughter here and there and cries of "Shame! " "That's all," said Jeremiah Mason. "I'm a gardener, and my old woman can cook and sew and do any-

thing honest. When we heard about this meeting from one of the church people here, we got on our knees and prayed that God would give us one chance to show that we are not unemployable. Give me a few acres of ground, and some seed and water, and two or three young fellows to help me, and I'll grow all the vegetables for all the people in your colony, or co-operative, or whatever you call it."

There were murmurs of interest in the hall. Things were beginning to warm up. They saw those vegetables in the ground, and tasted them on the table. A large stout lady with a red face and a hearty voice arose near the gardener.

"My name is Mrs. Flanagan, and I've got three lots out on Dexter Street that I bought from a land shark ten years ago. They've been sold for taxes, but I have my redemption rights for three years yet. I don't see why we couldn't grow something on them lots. They ain't no use to me."

One of the Reverend Myers's congregation rose. He had come because his pastor had invited him, and he had not expected to become mixed up in an undertaking which sounded "socialistic." But when he learned that an old couple had been praying to God, it seemed to him that a good Christian ought to see to it that God answered.

"I have a tract of four acres about two miles out of town. It has been planted to walnuts, but the trees are old, and they have been neglected since the price has gone so low. You could take out the dead trees and have half the wood, and then you could use the land until I sell it, which isn't apt to happen for some time, from the looks of the real estate market."

III

You could feel the interest in this meeting increasing right along. Nobody had had any idea that things would go so fast. There was something to this idea of co-operation after all. A big man rose at one side of the hall; a man with a chest like a barrel, and plenty of reddish hair, except on the very top of his head.

"I am a Dane," he said, in a warm and friendly voice. "My people know a lot about co-operation. You oughtn't have much trouble starting a co-op in this town. There's lots of kind people in America; people who know there's some-

thing wrong in our social system, and is trying to find ways to change it, and is willing to help and to give, if you approach them the right way, and convince them that you are worthy. And it is a fact all over the world that when you apply labour to land and raw materials, you produce a lot of wealth. What is more important for you to think about, and to get right at the outset, is the principles on which your society is founded; your form of organization, your technique of management. If you get those things right, you can grow and prosper; if you don't get them right, all your labour and enthusiasm may be wasted in friction of one sort or another."

Charlie Day, who had started out as chairman, was sitting back and letting the meeting run itself. Now he interjected: "Tell us your name."

"My name is Sig Soren," replied the other. "I have been a sailor, a gold prospector in Alaska, a miner. I am strong as an ox, and can do most any sort of work with my hands and my back. But I have tried also to use my head, which isn't so good. As a Dane I drank in co-operation with my mother's milk, and I can tell you some of the basic things. It is important to get food and clothing and shelter, but it's even more important to get ideals, and to realize that you are working for something greater than yourself. A true co-operative has to be based on human brotherhood; we ought to state at the outset that we are open to all men without distinction of race or colour or creed or party. We should ask no questions except, first, are you able to work, and second, are you willing to work. In the next place, we must all stand on an equal basis; every man and woman must be rewarded in proportion to the time they give to the co-op. I know that some kinds of service is more important than others; but such distinctions cannot be made until everybody has the basic necessities—and that you will find is a long time off.

"Also, you must have an exact accounting system. It will be better not to start until you get that. You must know what everything costs to produce, otherwise you will not know what to charge for it. The only sound basis for a co-operative economy is to have every credit you issue represent wealth which you have actually produced, and are in position to deliver. I was glad to hear that we have an accountant here—he will understand this, and be able to help us.

"We must have complete democracy in the control of our

organization; but also we must have efficiency, if we are really to get a living out of it. We must choose our leaders; then we must follow them, until such time as the majority may vote to replace them. At the outset we shall have a lot of cranks and nuts with us, people with hobbies to ride, and people who want to get something for nothing. But little by little we shall find those who can work, and those who are able to carry responsibility. Those are the ones we must put in charge."

It was evident to all that here was a man who knew what he was talking about, and they would have been glad to hear more from him; but he was a self-effacing man, and sat down, to give the others a chance.

Near the front rose a little old lady, clad in black, with snow-white hair, and pink cheeks, and the most benevolent expression anyone could imagine. She spoke in a voice so low that only a few up in front could hear. "I was glad to hear the gentleman speak about ideals. I think we should all be reminded that He in whose house we are meeting told us that we should love one another; also that His followers had all things except women in common. I would like to ask Reverend Myers to ask the blessing of our Heavenly Father upon this venture we are discussing."

The pastor came forward and closed his eyes, and all the people bowed their heads while he asked God to guide them in the effort to find a way to make brotherhood and universal love a reality in their daily affairs. The church people all felt better after this; and if others felt disapproval, they did not show it.

A strange figure rose to his feet in the audience, a man wearing a white robe and sandals, and no hat, indoors or out. His wavy brown hair came down to the collar of his robe, and he had a silky soft brown beard, and regular, calm features—in short, he might have stepped out of a stained-glass window in any church. People had stared at him when he came in, and then looked away for fear of seeming rude. Now he spoke in a gentle voice, carefully modulated, like an actor's.

"My friends, I have noted what has been said about ideals, and also what has been said about cranks. I have been called a crank, because I seek to embody my ideals in the flesh as well as in the spirit. Let me say that I hope to become a co-operator, and convince you that I do not want anything for nothing. It so happens that, like Mr. Mason who has

spoken here, I am a gardener. I love vegetables and, what is no less important, they love me, and it is love that makes all things to grow. I am successful in cultivating them, but I do not like to pull them out of the ground, or to cut them, so I always leave that sad duty to others. My name is Brother Lawrence."

He sat down; and at another place in the hall rose another figure who had been stared at not too rudely. He was a little fellow in short trousers and bare legs and sandals, and a khaki shirt open at the neck, and with short sleeves. There was a little red border to his trousers and one to each sleeve, and at the neck of his shirt. Oddest of all, a red bandanna handkerchief was wound about his head, making him look like a pirate—but a wholly benevolent and jolly pirate, such as might serve as illustration in a book for small children.

"Brothers and sisters," said he, "I would like to say something about nuts, as I have often been called one, I suppose because I am small and brown and solid. I am one who believes in fresh air and sunshine on the human body, and I think we ought to have a little more colour in our lives than we do. My name is Philosophus, which means a lover of the love of knowledge. I am a brother to all good men and women, so I belong in a co-operative. You will find that I can be useful in several ways. In the first place I can cast horoscopes, and tell you much about the prospects for your organization, and on what days you should do your planting and undertake other ventures. In the next place I have a small press, and I know how to set type, and you will find very soon that you will have to print notices and bulletins, and statements of the ideals of human brotherhood, so that those who are wandering in the darkness of greed and competition may be brought to the light."

Everybody was laughing happily when this speaker sat down. There seemed to be general agreement that Brother Lawrence, who was loved by the vegetables, and Philosophus, who could foretell the future, would do nobody any harm, and might make delightful household pets in a "co-op." The adventure grew more interesting every minute.

IV

Other men and women stood up one by one and told who they were and what they could do. There was a grave young man named Richard Atkins, who said that he had been a student at the university for many years; he had stayed on and taken everything they had, from astronomy to zoology, because it was a respectable place to be during the depression, and outside there was nothing to do. He was not sure if he had learned anything that would be useful in a co-op, but he assumed there would always be dishes to wash.

There was a pale young fellow who gave his name as Strubb, and said he was a filing clerk, and had just come out of jail—they had given him thirty days as a vagrant, because he had no "visible means of support." He wasn't sure if a co-op could provide such visible means, but if it could, he would be glad to have them, so that he could stay in some one place in America.

Then a little, earnest-looking, bald-headed man in spectacles, who gave the name of Thomas Cullen, and said he had been manager of a broker's office in Kansas City, and might be of use to them, because he knew how books should be kept and how a large business should be run. His trouble was the same as that of Strubbs—he had no place to stay. Did the co-op plan to have a dormitory, or was it only for people who had homes?

There rose an old white-haired man with trembling hands, who gave his name as Dad Slempe, and said that his grandfather had brought him over the emigrant trail in a covered wagon just after the Civil War. He had been a building contractor, and still had a home, and back of it was an old stable with a loft above, and if some able-bodied men chose to go in there and fix it up, he would be glad to have the company. He was too old to do any work for the co-op, but they could keep the place clean for him, and make any use of it they pleased.

This brought up the question of a headquarters and industrial centre for the proposed organization. Charlie Day suggested that they look for a vacant warehouse or storage place; their first need would be plenty of space, and looks would not count with them. It ought to be situated somewhere

in the working-class part of the town, near to the homes of their members.

Mrs. Emily Butters introduced herself as a laundry worker. "Looks like I'm the only one in this room that still has a job," said she. "I have a brother-in-law that was in the wholesale paint business, and he owned a big warehouse that is located pretty central. The business failed and the building was took over by the Security Mortgage Company. I see they've got a sign out, 'for sale,' but it stays empty, and every time I go by, it seems there's a new window broke, so maybe they'd be glad to have it took care of. One good thing about it, there's a stairs inside and sort of half-story—that's where the windows is, and it could be used for the office."

Here was the advantage of co-operation, made plain to the most sceptical. They had a clearing house of information, and found out things which none of them alone could have learned. There were other suggestions as to buildings, and Charlie Day made note of the different addresses. Presently they would choose a committee to inspect these buildings and find out on what terms they could be had.

The talk turned to the embarrassing subject of money. They could hardly expect to get a building just for keeping the windows in repair. They would need other sums for absolutely necessary things, a telephone, and a set of books, and perhaps glass for broken windows. How, for that matter, were they going to live, those of them who had no funds whatever, until the time when Mr. Mason and Brother Lawrence and others were able to coax some vegetables out of the ground?

Sig Soren rose with the suggestion that they should contact the charity authorities, and find out what would be their attitude towards the proposed venture; would they hold that working in a co-op was a "job," or would the members still be entitled to aid, at least until the co-op was producing? This was important for them to know, for many of them would not dare to join if it meant loss of their weekly supply of potatoes and beans.

A woman sprang up—her name was Mrs. Jane Pitter, she said, and she had three children, and could tell them just exactly what they would find. She proceeded to tell, in a voice shrill with indignation. They would be told that the question had never been ruled upon, but that if they would come back

next week they would get an answer. When they went back next week they would be referred to some other official; he wouldn't know anything about it, and would tell them to come two weeks later. This time when they came they would find that he didn't remember them.

They would be stalled along for two months, and then they would be told that it was all right for them to join the co-op; a week later, after they had joined, they would be told that those who had joined were not eligible for charity, and their grocery cards would be stopped—and then they would have another three months' siege to get back, in the course of which half a dozen different officials would take every occasion to insult and humiliate them—yes, that was what they were paid their salaries for, to try and find any excuse in the world to keep from giving people any food until they had starved to death, or shut their children up in a room and turned on the gas before the gas company turned it off for good—and Mrs. Pitter knew all about it, she had been through it for more than a year now, and she poured it out in an incoherent torrent, with her thin face turning from white to red and her thin hands waving with futile gestures.

There were murmurs of sympathy during this outburst, and applause when it was finished. Evidently there were others who had been "investigated," and tied up in the red tape of public and private charity. Bill Mase, the old time co-operator, said that all the charity agencies put together hadn't a tenth part of the money that was needed in this emergency. Everybody was under the spell of the illusion spread by the capitalist press, that the depression was a temporary thing, and prosperity was coming back and would give everybody jobs. The authorities were trying to keep down expenditures—except their own salaries, of course. It was the taxpayers who controlled elections, and the taxpayers wanted no more taxes.

Mrs. Flanagan, the Irish lady who had offered the three lots, said that a good many taxpayers weren't worrying any more, they had just stopped paying their taxes. It was the fault of the cheap political grafters they had been electing on the Republican ticket; she hoped they would all make note that election day was only two weeks off, and they would have the chance to elect a Democrat, a real friend of the people, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had promised to remember the forgotten man, and give them a New Deal, and when he came

into office, on March 4th, they would have real relief, cash relief, and no more red tape or nonsense. Loud applause for this programme!

V

There arose at this juncture a young man of earnest aspect, wearing horn-rimmed spectacles and a shock of long, black hair, which in the vehemence of his speech he caused to fall down over the spectacles, and then had to toss back into place.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said he, "let me tell you that the evils which confront the working classes of this country are far more serious than can be cured by such palliatives as relief, and that it is not a question of replacing one set of capitalist politicians by another set. It is a question of fundamental reconstruction of our economy. The tools of production are the private property of a small exploiting class, and the workers get only a competitive wage, which enables them to exist and go on producing for their masters. Even if a small group like this should succeed in getting hold of some of the means of production, you will have the entire capitalist economy against you, and will be exploited at every turn, whenever you make a purchase, or enter into any relationship with the master class and their system. It is only when the workers take possession of all the machines of production and distribution that they can free themselves from the chains of capitalism. That is the programme of the Communist party, on behalf of which I speak."

There was a stir throughout the hall. Here was one of these dreaded "Reds," about whom they had read so much in the papers, but whom most of them had never before seen alive and in the flesh. There was a general craning of necks and staring. The Reverend Myers, on the platform, started to rise from his seat; this was the kind of incident he had dreaded, and if it should get into the newspapers, it would be most distressing. The young orator had taken his breath, and was about to begin another sentence, when Charlie Day took the word away from him.

"My young friend," said he, "we are all American citizens here, and we all have the right to voice our political opinions. But this audience has met for a particular purpose, to discuss plans for a self-help co-operative, and I am sure this is not an occasion for the raising of political issues."

"It is not a political issue that I am trying to discuss, sir," insisted the young man. "It is a question of fundamental economics. It is a question whether any co-operative can exist alongside a capitalist economy."

"Well, we are people who believe that it can exist, and we mean to try it."

"Even though it may be demonstrable that your efforts are doomed to failure?"

"Even so, my friend. We mean to produce goods for ourselves if we can get the chance."

"But, Mr. Chairman"—the orator's voice rose higher—"Mr. Chairman, I can show you——"

"We don't want you to show us anything, young man. You are out of order."

"Mr. Chairman, I appeal in the name of free speech."

"Sit down! Sit down!" shouted several voices; and men started to rise, as if to seize the disturber.

"Take it easy," said Charlie Day, with the manner of one who was used to the platform and its mishaps. "I have been told that Communists do not believe in free speech, they believe in dictatorship. But it happens that we are practising democracy——"

"Very well! I appeal in the name of democracy, Mr. Chairman!"

"All right, my friend, your appeal shall be heard. We will leave it to the audience whether they wish to go on forming a co-operative, or stop and listen to a Communist speech. I will call for a show of hands, and give you the first chance. All those who wish to hear this young man's speech will please raise their right hands."

One man raised his hand—and then jerked it down quickly, as if he had made a mistake. There was laughter in the audience, and the chairman said:

"Now, all those who want to go on with the co-op raise their hands."

All hands went up, and there was more laughter, and applause for this popular method of handling the problem. The young man reached under his seat and got his hat and walked out, followed by a girl companion, both holding their heads high with scorn for the bourgeois delusions of the American working class.

VI

In the meantime, Sig Soren had asked for the floor.

"My friends," he said, in his warm and caressing voice, "I am glad that young man raised the issue, because we shall always have some of his way of thinking among us, and it is a good thing for us to make up our minds what attitude we are going to take to the class struggle. We all know there is fundamental injustices in our civilization, and we all want to change them. It is a question of how to go about it. I for my part have respect for those who have the courage to go out and raise a clamour against the needless sufferings of our people; but my judgment has led me to adopt a different line of action. I want to try the method of persuasion, and forbearance while we are trying to persuade. That is why I am committed to co-operatives, which are an actual beginning at the collective ownership of the tools of production. If we are going to try such an experiment, we have to get clear in our minds what we are doing, and in what spirit.

"Here in San Sebastian is men who own and manage the banks and the big businesses. We know who they are, and we know a little of what their power is. They run this town. We may not like that, but it is the fact; and the question is, what attitude are we going to take to those fellows. There's no use fooling ourselves—they can destroy us if they want to; they can wipe us out before we get a start; and they will if we give them reason to fear us, or to hate us. They have the police, and can dig up a hundred ordinances that nobody has heard of in a dozen years, and harass us out of business. They have the newspapers; they can print nasty stories about us, and keep people from wanting to have anything to do with us.

"More than that, we have to realize that we can't keep secrets from them. They make it their business to know what is going on in their town; they will have spies in our co-operative; it's more than likely they have somebody here to-night, to see what kind of people we are, and what we are planning to do. It may be one of the persons who has spoke here already, and has won your regard, and is going to enter the co-op as a leader. The only thing we can do is to be sincere and aboveboard, and have no secrets from anybody.

"Here is the thing as I see it. It will do no serious harm to anybody in San Sebastian for us to get the means of producing what we ourselves are going to consume. We are not customers of the businessmen in any true sense, because we no longer have any money, and if we buy things, it is only after they themselves have gave us the money, in the form of public or private charity. If we support ourselves, we take ourselves off the backs of the taxpayers—that is to say, those who still have some money, the businessmen.

"All right, then; let us take the position that we are self-respecting people, brought to dependence through no fault of our own, and trying to win independence by our honest labour. We are not enemies of anybody, and we are not trying to antagonize anybody, but rather to serve others at the same time that we serve ourselves. Let us ask the businessmen to put themselves in our places, and to do for us what they would want did for them.

"I was interested to hear Mr. Atkins say that he had took all the courses at the university, from astronomy to zoology; I wanted to ask him if he had took any psychology, because we shall need a lot of that. I never studied in any university, but I have studied in the forecastles of ships, and in mining camps and lumber shacks; I have noted what makes men misunderstand and hate you, and I think there is enough hatred now in the world, and I want to study how to reduce it. I would like to take the most hard-boiled and selfish businessman in this town, and sit down in his office and explain to him the idea of a self-help co-operative, and ask him to let us have tools out of his supply, or food out of his store to feed us while we work—not as charity, but in exchange for a credit account, to be paid in services which we will honestly render to him, dollar for dollar. I believe we can win one of those men, and when we have won him, he will help us to win others—just for the sake of proving himself right in trusting us."

This speech left everybody feeling fine. This was what they wanted: the American way! The room became suffused with an atmosphere of prosperity and patriotism. They saw the rich and powerful ones of San Sebastian taking them up, making them something in the way of municipal pets. Yes, a "co-op" was a grand thing! A frail little woman rose to her feet—"Mrs. Buttongall, if you please; and I might say

that I agree, you won't have the least trouble in finding some rich people in this town who believe that the poor ought to go to work! "

VII

They got down to practical problems. What kind of business were they going to do? What kind of wealth would they produce? They would have different departments in their co-operative, according to the skills they had, and the opportunities they discovered. Presently they found themselves referring to these departments as "sections," and the name stuck.

They would have a "headquarters section" composed of the office workers. Then there would have to be a section of those in the field, the scouts who went out to drum up business, to make contacts. Presently they were calling this the "contact section." Already they had been offered the use of some land, so they would want a gardening section; when they had got some products, they would need a canning section. A chance to cut up some old trees was before them; that would mean a wood section. To bring the wood in, and any food they might get hold of, they must have a transportation section, one of the most important of all. Was there a good garage mechanic in the audience?

A man stood up, lean and wiry, with a long neck and a skin browned and weather-beaten; his name was Pete Shaver, he said, and he came from Texas. He had been in the A.E.F., the American Expeditionary Force, and then in the B.E.F., the Bonus Expeditionary Force, and he had found the latter by far more dangerous. Prior to that he had run a threshing outfit, and knew all about engines, and could repair most any kind of truck. The problem was to find the truck. "First ketch your rabbit," said Pete.

They discussed that problem. Many of those present still had a family car; when you gave that up in California, you had about lost your last chance of a job—for how were you going to get to it? That was a cause of everlasting wrangles with the charity people; they couldn't understand how a family could be starving, and still able to drive a car. But how were they to get to the charity place, when it was five miles away, and the streetcar lines ran crossways to the route?

Those who had cars would be glad to use them to help

get the co-operators to their work. But a truck was another matter. Nobody knew of a truck which could be got in exchange for services of any sort. If you had a little cash, now, that would be different. You could get a truck by a small down payment. But not too cheap, put in the man from Texas; he'd rather spend his time drivin' than repairin'. It would take some lookin' over, that there truck.

There were other suggestions for "sections." The frail little woman who bore the odd name of Buttongall got up again, and suggested that they would no doubt get a lot of used clothing. That was the favourite way of helping the poor but worthy. They would have to clean and repair this clothing, so they would need a sewing section. Then Scotty Adams, the carpenter, rose. Please don't forget him; they would have odd jobs of repairing, and would need a building section.

That made eight sections, said Charlie Day; enough for one night. It would take them quite a while to select competent heads for those eight, and get them working efficiently. He suggested that they return to the question which might be hardest of all. How were they going to raise some immediate cash?

For the first time there were no people popping up to be heard. There was a dead silence.

"Perhaps I better tell you my own story," said Charlie. "I had a fine position. I won't say what salary I got—you wouldn't believe me. But anyhow the depression cleaned me out. I wasn't willing to borrow from friends; but I wouldn't mind doing it for a thing like this. So I'll be able to get along for a while without asking anything of the co-op. But some cash we must have; even if we find a building that we can get in trade, we can't get along without a phone. There will be a down payment for light, and all sorts of small items, nails, glass for repairs, some stationery, and so on."

Again there was an embarrassed silence.

"Suppose we put it this way," said Day; "those of us who have any money at all shall put in a small amount to get things started. In other words, we have an admission or membership fee. Those who have no cash can pay their fee in services."

You could hear what seemed a sigh of relief. So many of them had no money—but they had unlimited services! They

discussed the problem, and it was finally decided that those who could help should put in five dollars, and that others should give two days' services before they received any credits from the group.

VIII

A young woman rose in the back of the hall; she was thin and very pale, and those who were near her noticed that she clung to the back of the chair. Grace Megrue was her name. "What I want to know is, how people are supposed to live while you're getting this thing started. Here is winter coming, and you can't put any seed in the ground for a while, can you? How are we going to eat?"

"I wish I could answer, lady," said Charlie, to whom the question seemed to be addressed. "If I could provide a living for everybody, I'd do it. As it is, we have to try to find ranchers who have surplus stocks of food, and will let us have them for labour. Some day a truck may come in with a load of cabbages, or walnuts, or oranges. Meanwhile we have to go on living as we have."

"That is sometimes very poorly, Mr. Day."

"I know it, lady, but what can we do? This is a fact we must face—we may have to build this institution out of our blood. If we get a little cash, it will have to go for tools to work with; we can't use any of it to support our members, or to feed them. If we did, we'd just be one more soup kitchen; people would support it for a while, and then get tired of it, as they do—and we'd have no co-op. If we can raise some cash, it must go for a plough, or some water pipe for our garden, or a saw, or whatever we need for the work."

Pete Shaver, thresherman from Texas, stood up. "Here's something we got to think about. Everybody in this room has got some things at home that we could use in this here business. Somebody's got a plough, somebody else has got a saw, a wood stove, some writing-paper, some extra bedding. They ought to bring a' them things in and take credits in the co-op."

"What are the goin' to get for their credits?" demanded a voice.

"Listen here, brother," said Pete. He peered over the heads of the crowd to see the questioner, and with his long

thin neck and Adam's apple he made one think of a partridge on a tree-limb. "Listen here, brother, we're agoin' out and ask people in this town to trust our co-op and let us have goods on credit. A fine show we'd put up if we didn't take our own credit! "

"But I'm trying to understand," said the other; he was a large and pasty-faced and partly bald man, Mr. Rendant, who was to become the efficient head of their "baking section." "A lot of others want to try to get this thing clear. What will the credits be good for? "

"They'll be good for whatever the co-op can get for its members," replied Pete. "We're all going to work, trading our services for anything we can find. You heard a gentleman offer us a tract with some old trees. That means our wood section will bring in loads of firewood, and our members will get it for their credits. It'll be priced at whatever it costs to produce—it'll be your work swapped for the work of the woodcutters. Maybe there'll be some walnuts on them trees, and we'll get half for the pickin'; if there's walnuts in the commissary, all the squirrels will come runnin'. If we work with sense, we get some goods; if we don't, nobody's goin' to shed no tears over us."

"I see," said the baker, and sat down.

Someone brought a note up to the clergyman on the platform. He read it and a smile spread over his face; he came forward and raised his hand. "I have pleasant news for you, friends. A gentleman who is known to me, and is a man of his word, wishes to contribute the sum of fifty dollars to the starting of this enterprise."

Oh, what a thrill! Handclapping and cheers all over the hall. It came at just the right moment, when they were in their secret hearts tormented at the thought of sparing a little cash for this enterprise; denying themselves food, or delaying with the rent, or wearing old ragged shoes a while longer.

"I am sure that you will wish me to thank this friend, who prefers that his name be not given," said Reverend Myers. They all made plain that they did.

Sig Soren took the occasion to look over in the direction of Mabel Saugus, who sat with a couple of friends at one side of the hall. She nodded, and Sig rose.

"My friends," he said, "I also know someone who is interested in this undertaking, a lady who has authorized me

to say that she will make a contribution to the rent, and will put in one hundred dollars towards the purchase of a truck and various tools which may be needed."

Still louder cheers and applause. Sig Soren, that big barrel-chested fellow, that combination of Viking and cherub—he had known what he was talking about when he said there were rich people in San Sebastian who were both kind-hearted and intelligent! He had had that money up his sleeve all the while, the foxy one! Hurrah for Sig Soren! Hurrah for Denmark!

"Don't get the idea that it's my money," said he, blushing with embarrassment. "I'd hate to have anybody get me wrong on that."

"Whoever she is, God bless her!" cried old Jeremiah Mason, the gardener, who had been classified as "unemployable."

"Amen! Amen!" cried voices all over the hall; there were church people here, the kind that were used to addressing the Lord in person.

Mabel Saugus sat with her ears burning, hoping she was not giving herself away. She was surprised, because she had promised two hundred dollars, and Sig had said only one hundred. But she guessed what was in his mind; it was better to start on a modest scale, and let them do as much for themselves as they would and could. If there were large sums in sight, the grafters and self-seekers would be more apt to elbow their way in. But Mabel had decided that most of these people were honest, and meant to do real work.

IX

"Just so that we know where we stand," said Charlie Day, "how many of you expect to join this co-op? Raise your hands, and keep them up while I count."

He counted, and there were more than forty. "That is enough for a good start. No doubt you know others who will be glad to hear about it."

He had brought with him loose sheets of paper, and asked that these be passed out. "We must have your names and addresses. Let us have your name if you are the least bit interested. You may come to other meetings. Give us your telephone number if you have one."

He waited until they got this writing done, and then went on: "Put down the kind of work you can do; first the kind you prefer, and then what you can do if you have to." Then: "Put down whether you can pay your five dollars in cash, or if it has to be in labour." And again: "Tell us what you can contribute in the form of tools, or any supplies—whatever you have that is useful, and that we can have for credits. It is important for us to know if we have carpenter's tools, gardener's tools, stoves, rope, jars for canning—so on through a long list."

All this took a lot of writing, by persons who wrote slowly, and sometimes had to lend their pencils around. In the meantime Thomas Cullen, ex-manager of a broker's office, brought up the subject of committees to work out the project. "We want to get to it right away; it's not doing us any good to sit around."

"Quite so," said Charlie. "It seems to me that our committees should meet to-morrow morning, and stay right on the job till our co-op has started work. In fact, the committees will be the co-op in its first stages. I'll say more: everyone who means to join the co-op ought to be on one of the committees from the start. That's the way we'll get our education, and get the thing in our minds; we'll hear the discussion, and if we see any objections we'll bring them up, and if there's anything we don't understand, we won't be afraid to ask. There's nobody going to do any of this for us, and the quicker we learn to do it ourselves the better for us all."

They discussed different committees which would be needed. First, and most important, one on organization. They would be, presumably, what the law called an "association"; they would draw up a declaration of their purposes, and provide for a governing body, a constitution and a set of bylaws.

"Let's make all that as simple as we can," said Sig Soren; "something that all of us can understand. We must decide about our sections, and how they will be run; then a governing council of some sort—I suppose the section heads would compose this; and finally a general assembly of the co-op, which will meet once a month or so, and have full authority over all affairs of the organization."

There would need to be a committee on accounting, said Bill Mase, the old co-operator; being an accountant himself.

he could be useful, and help them to work out a system of credits, and one of cost accounting.

Also they would want a committee to find a headquarters. "That ought to get to work right off," said Scotty Adams, the carpenter. "I know about buildings, and I got a car, but the trouble is, I only got about half a gallon of gas in the tank, enough to get us home to-night. The car and me is at your service, but you got to furnish the gas somehow."

"There should be a committee to interview the charity people, and the county relief authorities," said Mrs. Jane Pitter, who had been in the fight with them. "There is a lot of us that just wouldn't dare to join anything, unless we could be sure they wouldn't penalize us."

"That wouldn't need to be a big committee, would it?" asked Charlie; but the fiery little lady said it ought to contain everybody in the room, and ten times as many. These charity people would do any cruel thing they could think of to a single person, but they were afraid of a crowd, and threats of trouble that would get them into the newspapers, and let the public find out how stupid and callous they were.

Someone suggested that it would be a fine thing to have a clergyman on that committee, and everybody of course looked at Reverend Myers, which rather put him on the spot. He pleaded his many duties, and finally compromised by asking if some of the ladies of his church who were present would go with the committee and try to persuade the relief people to consider a co-operative as a useful social service, deserving of encouragement, and perhaps of aid.

Someone suggested a committee on contacts; but after they had discussed the idea, they decided that this should wait until they had an organization and a headquarters. They must make no promises until they knew they could keep them. But there should be a committee to receive and handle the funds which had been promised. At Charlie Day's suggestion it was voted to instruct this committee that no money was to be spent for anything except absolutely indispensable things, and that nothing should be bought for cash which could be obtained in exchange for labour.

Pete Shaver rose, and nominated for the finance committee Charlie Day, Sig Soren and Thomas Cullen. This resolution was carried.

There were to be four other committees: organization,

accounting, headquarters, relief. It was suggested that each person should write on his paper which committee he or she preferred to serve on. It was agreed that all the committees should meet for work at nine o'clock on the following morning. The question was, where? Charlie said: "We don't want to impose on the kindness of Reverend Myers. I hope he will tell us frankly if it will be an inconvenience if we meet in this hall and divide up into our committees and talk over our plans."

This gave the clergyman the chance for a friendly little closing speech. He said that he had been deeply interested in the proceedings, and thought they had displayed both judgment and fairness; he was sure the church members who were present agreed with him in this. He could not see that it would do any harm for them to use the assembly room for conferences, until they had found their own headquarters—of course, he assumed that this would not be many days. They assured him that it would not; and so the meeting adjourned, with everybody happy, and much handshaking, and making of new friendships. There was going to be a co-op in San Sebastian!

CHAPTER IV

FROM HIM THAT HATH

I

THEOPHILUS FLEMING, President of the Golden State Light and Power Company, was in a rage at the breakfast table, in spite of all that a clinic full of doctors had told him about the effect of mental strain upon the glands regulating digestion. His wife had come down to sit with him; and that always meant two separate troubles—first, that "Thee" couldn't read his morning paper, and second, that he was going to be told that one of the children had to have some money.

"Mrs. Pat" sat across the little table from him in the sun-flooded breakfast-room. She was clad in an embroidered blue

silk kimono and slippers shining with rhinestones. Her snow-white hair was done up in a little tower on her head, and her complexion was the product of fifty years of unremitting attention; soft and pink and without a wrinkle. Very certainly nothing had ever been permitted to interfere with the glands which regulated the digestion of Mrs. Patricia Fleming.

She was a Van Dyke of Philadelphia, with all that that means. To her it signified royalty; the unquestioned superiority of herself to everybody and everything that came into her life. There is a saying that in New York they ask you what you own, in Boston they ask you what you know, and in Philadelphia they ask you who was your grandfather. Everybody knew who Mrs. Pat's two grandfathers were; she had them in oils on the walls of her dining-room, and it never at any moment crossed her mind to doubt that she was born to tell other people what was right and proper. She held her head high, and wore a quiet smile, concealing the firmness of her will.

Some thirty years ago, family necessities had compelled Patricia Van Dyke to marry a "commoner." Having made up her mind, she had gone through with it, playing her part with dignity and without repining. She had taken charge of "Thee" Fleming, who had begun life as a section boss on a railroad, and had made him over and established him socially. She had learned that a crude and violent man would sometimes lose his temper, and misconduct himself in the presence of his wife; but never would she condescend to his level, never, as she said, would the manners of the railroad camp prevail in her home. She would draw herself up with dignity, and absent herself from the room, and await the capitulation which never failed to come.

So Mrs. Pat got away with it, in her home as in the world outside. Society, the church, the press, all took her at her own valuation. She was splendid at receptions and dinner parties and all occasions of state; "Old Thee" was forced to admit that even from the vulgar business point of view she was worth every dollar she had cost him. He could not help what his wife called "haggling and higgling"; but in the end he paid the bills.

They had four children, now grown up, and three of them married; it was about these, and the in-laws, that the breakfast-table storms now raged. The old man still clung to the

plebeian idea that everybody in the world ought to be "useful"; the notion that to be ornamental was a form of usefulness was one which caused his glands to pour an undue amount of adrenalin into his blood stream. The fact that none of his children had ever been arrested for anything but speeding, and that all had perfect manners, and danced divinely, and played good tennis and golf, and that one was studying painting in Paris—all that to the ex-section boss meant practically nothing. It was his idea that they should sit in an office all day and concentrate with furious intensity upon the making of more money; and to the mother's sincere question, "Why should they?" he could only reply by storming out of the house.

This time the trouble was over Genevieve, the young matron who had invited Mabel Saugus to dinner and had been so stunned by the refusal. Genevieve was married to Freddie Whiteing, one of the polo stars of the town. Thee had insisted that his son-in-law should earn his own living; which meant merely that Genevieve should be supported by her husband's father instead of by her own. The two families had compromised by setting Freddie up in a stock and bond office, which was all right until the slump—and surely poor Freddie was not to blame for that! Nobody was buying stocks or bonds, and the office stood empty, and of course the bills had to be paid, and the fifteen or twenty thousand dollars a year necessary for Genevieve and her two children simply had to be put up by Thee, because the Whiteing money was all in real estate, and you know what that meant.

The old "magnate" would grovel and cringe, and bluster and storm; and Mrs. Pat would smile, and say in her quiet but implacable voice: "Don't be silly, dear. I know perfectly well that you've got fortunes salted away all over the place. Don't tell me that California Fruit Express isn't paying dividends, because I read it in the paper."

"But, woman, do you think I get a million a year out of that?"

"I wouldn't be surprised if you got two millions out of it."

"I'm telling you that I had to borrow from the banks again to meet my last income tax instalment."

"Yes, dear; but as you know, the government published the income tax figures of the year nineteen-twenty-four."

There it was again! The published income tax figures of

the year 1924! The wretched demagogues in Congress had passed a law requiring that the amount of income tax payments be made public, and a thousand kinds of vultures had come swarming—first newspaper reporters, and then swindlers, gold-brick promoters, bootleggers, racketeers, blackmailers, kidnappers—and wives. Yes, above all, wives! Theophilus Fleming had been caught lying to his wife—caught red-handed, and nailed down tight! Never in all his future life would he be able to plead lack of funds, without hearing about the income tax figures of 1924. If the doctors of the San Sebastian College Clinic, who shook their heads over the excess of adrenalin in his blood stream, had put a psychoanalyst at work on the problem, they would have found that the solution lay in getting his wife to agree never again to mention the income tax figures of 1924. But who would have dared suggest such a thing to the patroness of the clinic?

II

Theophilus Fleming emerged to the porte-cochère of his hillside mansion, and stepped into his shiny new limousine. His old one had been good enough, but he had been forced to trade it in. His chauffeur had a new grey uniform and cap—and again the old ones had been good enough for any sensible man, but they had been discarded. The same thing with the black overcoat with black silk lining which the magnate himself wore; the old one disappeared, and the new was lifted up and slid on to his shoulders by the butler. "Madame's orders," was the word.

In front of the old gentleman stretched a view which would have been famous if it had been in Italy or France. The car was rolling down a slope, and there were more slopes below it, and then the city with its gardens and parks, its cluster of office buildings and show hotels. Beyond that lay the bay, oh, so blue in the morning sunshine. It was a feast for the eye, but Old Thee did not partake of it; he was absorbed in an inner process, telling Mrs. Pat what he thought of all her foolishness. He was uttering magnificent defiances, delivering ultimatums—all without a sound, save now and then a slight grunt or snort. Thomas, the chauffeur, who knew the domestic situation, also had an inner process—he was smiling to himself. But his eyes were fixed on the winding grade, and

the muscles of his face were as rigid as those of the sphinx of Egypt.

On one of the boulevards in the residence district the car suddenly swept to the kerb and stopped. The horn tooted once, and immediately the door of a house opened, and there emerged a little, white-haired old gentleman, wearing a grey overcoat and a grey Fedora hat; a sprightly old gentleman, moving quickly, yet not without caution, and helped by a gold-headed cane. Before starting down the steps, he waved the cane, and called: "Walking." Whereupon Thomas the chauffeur stepped out of the Fleming car, and assisted his employer to alight.

George Reverdy Mills came toddling down the path, talking the whole way, in the loud voice of one who was slightly deaf. "Well, here we are, still alive! Glorious morning! See in the papers they're having their first snow in the Rockies—school bus snowed up. We get spoiled out here, Thee, don't know how lucky we are. Take our sunshine for granted."

"Have you failed to mention it in the last fifty years?" growled Thee.

"Sore again, old bear?" chirruped the other, as they started down the street side by side. "Another spat in the family?"

"Same old story—the children trying to drive me bankrupt."

"Can't do a thing about it, Thee. Might as well forget it. My Jane threw a dinner plate at her Peter last night. I said 'Go to it—only leave me out.' Can't control them. Our parents couldn't control us, could they? Remember it?"

"At least we didn't throw money out the windows."

"We didn't have it, that's why. When they haven't got it, they'll stop."

The chauffeur had turned the car around and gone home. This was the procedure when the weather was fair, and Old George's gout not too bad. Long ago the town had got used to the spectacle of two millionaires walking, not on the golf-course, but on the street like ordinary folks. It was doctor's orders; Old Thee making himself take the exercise he hated.

He had been a big fellow all his life, and was still big, only now his flesh was sagging; his cheeks hung in pouches, and his chin had become two ropes—not so good, the doctors said. So he walked every morning, and his old crony with

him—always on the right side, to favour George's good ear.

George Reverdy Mills belonged to one of the old Eastern families. He had money, and he didn't care who knew it. On the door of his office in the Golden State Building he had his full name inscribed, followed by the hated word "Capitalist." He was in the telephone-book the same way—the only man in the town who had that much nerve. "I'm a capitalist and I'm going to stay one—till the Bolsheviki come!" It was one of the jokes he carried in stock. He said it as the pious churchman says "God willing."

"Well, Thee, steel is down another two points this morning." George made it his rule to phone his brokers in New York every morning before leaving the house. Because of the difference in time, he got the prices up to noon.

"There's no bottom to the market," said Thee.

"Going straight to hell," assented the other, cheerfully. "You took my advice just in time."

"If it keeps up, every bank in this town is going to have to close."

"Well, Thee, you and I'll find out about it a day in advance."

"But what's going to become of the country? "

"Let 'em learn their lesson. You and I can't teach 'em. When I was a kid, my dad used to tell me, 'Take care of yourself, George; nobody else in the world will do it.' I took his advice; seventy-six next week—not so bad, hey? Grandchildren going to give themselves a party in my name. Seventy-six candles—that'll take quite a bit of cake. He, he!" Old George had a way of chuckling at the end of his speeches; then he would have to work his dental plates back into place.

So these two cronies toddled down the street side by side, discussing their family and business affairs; a highly unconventional procedure, and not without its dangers. More than one shrewd man in the town had timed his morning walk behind theirs, or had sent some agent to do it, and many a market order had been placed with Thee's son-in-law right afterwards. Old Thee guessed it; he said to his friend: "When I was a kid I used to tie the old mule to the plough with rope, and plough the cotton patch, and the blackbirds used to follow me and pick up the worms and the bugs." "Te, he, he!" answered George.

III

Theophilus Fleming entered his office by a private door, which had no name plate on it, and to which he alone had the key. His mail lay opened on his desk, and he hung up his overcoat and hat and went straight to it. Family troubles and quarrels were forgotten; everything else was forgotten. This was his world, of which he was master. This was the man's world, in which things were done that were real, that amounted to something; you could prove it by auditors and accountants.

The quarterly report of the Golden State Light and Power Company lay on the desk. Thee knew what would be in it, but all the same he went over it line by line, with the loving thrill a poet would get from the recital of a masterpiece. Every line in it had special significance for him; every line was a drama, a history, a record of controversies and struggles, of decisions taken and victories won. Hard work; man's work!

Some years back there had been in California a strong movement for "public ownership." An initiative measure had been put before the people, authorizing the state to issue bonds to the extent of five hundred millions of dollars, for the development of public power plants and transmission lines. To Old Thee that would have meant the end of the world; he was one of the group which raised half a million dollars—not out of their own pockets, of course, but out of the pockets of the stockholders and the consumers, to save them from this menace of "State Socialism." Thee and his friends had called themselves by various names—"taxpayers' leagues" and "citizens' associations." They had carried on an elaborate campaign—hiring lecturers and college professors to prepare articles and pamphlets and speeches, exposing the failures of municipal and state enterprises all over the world. If most of the failures were imaginary, and most of the figures false, Thee would resolutely refuse to know it, and would preserve the righteous conviction that he was saving the state from ruin.

The initiative had been defeated, and so most of the new development in water and power had been privately financed. The results were before him in an auditor's report; nine and one-half per cent profit on a swollen capitalization. Not a bad

showing, in the midst of a depression, with most private enterprises "in the red." A goodly block of the stock lay in Thee's safe-deposit box; other blocks were owned by his family and friends, those whom he had favoured and advised. This suffused about him an attitude of respect, and even awe, grateful to the soul of an old man.

But one does not sit upon such a treasure heap and take naps. Eternal vigilance is the price of the businessman's liberty to make money. A member of the state railroad commission had just died; the public body which fixed utility rates, and which had before it always the clamours of demagogues, pointing to the profits of light and power corporations, and demanding reductions in rates. Thee would have to consult with other utility men throughout the state, and agree upon the name of the new appointee. It was a part of his job to keep his hand on every lever and switch, his eye on every indicator and gauge of the government of California, and of the Republican party which controlled it.

There was another grave matter before Thee. He was a director and heavy investor in a trucking and commission concern which handled produce grown in one of California's valleys. By various devices this concern had built up a monopoly, and made it all but impossible for any of the ranchers to market their specialized crops independently. With prices dropping, it was hard enough for Thee and his friends to keep up their dividends; of necessity they had had to cut the share of the ranchers, who in return had been forced to pare the wages of their workers.

These were seasonal workers, for the most part wretched foreigners, who came one week and were gone the next, and had no claim upon the communities in which they laboured. Now there were agitators among them, strikes were threatened—which meant that Old Thee had to read the reports of detective agencies, and of confidential persons whom he employed to check on the agencies. In these reports he found much over which to wrinkle his brows. Old George might chuckle, with his cynical attitude of "After us the deluge"; but the president of the Golden State Light and Power Company was a serious man, carrying upon his bowed shoulders the burden of law and order.

He went over other letters, making marks on them which his secretary would understand. "N" meant no reply; "T"

meant that his secretary would prepare a cordial letter of thanks; "A" meant a letter of apology, expressing regret that Mr. Fleming was unable to take up the matter, or make the investment, or endorse the note, or whatever it might be. Other initials meant the name of the person or agency to which the matter was to be referred. All such letters went into a basket.

IV

When Thee had finished, he pressed a button and his secretary appeared. "Good morning, Mr. Fleming."

"Anybody to see me, John?"

"Nobody that you need to see; unless it's Mr. Len Saugus."

"Oh, that pinhead!" said Thee. But he thought a moment. The ex-rancher had money to invest, and was one of the few live customers of his son-in-law. "All right, send him in."

The secretary took the basket of letters and went out, and presently came back, escorting the figure of Len Saugus, dressed, like Dan McGinty, in his best suit of clothes, but looking, with his big hands and feet, his leather-tanned skin and stooped shoulders, like nothing so much as an overgrown ploughboy. He held his hat humbly in his two hands, like a servant. "Good morning, Mr. Fleming."

"Well, Len, how are things going with you?"

"Fine, Mr. Fleming, fine; no complaint at all."

"And what can I do for you?"

"Well, I've got a proposition that I want to ask your advice about."

"Another one already?"

"Well, yes, you see——"

"They're after you pretty hot, hey? What's this one?"

"It's looks extra good to me. In the mountains thirty miles back of my ranch there are some gold claims——"

"Oh, my God, Len Saugus—are you going to let them rope you in on a gold mine?"

"But, Mr. Fleming——"

"Listen, man, it isn't a damn bit of business of mine, but it makes me sick to see a fellow like you get a bit of money, and then the vultures gather round him and pick his bones.

What in the world do you need with a gold mine? "

" Well, you see, the price of gold is going up——"

" Yes, and the price of suckers goes up with it, step by step. Len, you're an old Californian. Don't you know the stories of men who have spent their lives chasing the end of the rainbow, and dying in the poorhouse? Starving themselves and their families—I've staked them out of sheer pity, and seen them load their burros and wander out into the mountains, at an age when they should have been nursing their great-grandchildren."

" But these claims are proven, Mr. Fleming."

" Len, there are just as many ways to prove a gold mine as there are to prove a shell game. Why in God's name can't you be content to put your money into government bonds? Then you're tax-exempt, and safe for life. If you want to play, take up something you can pay for out of your income; raise fancy chickens, or beautiful horses—something you know about, and that won't lure you on, and make you spend more than you've got. Don't come to me with any more of your investment propositions, because I'm not going in with you, and I'm not going to have any patience with you. You don't know anything about mining, and you don't know anything about business, and that's what your father would tell you if he was alive to-day. Some day you'll thank me for talking straight to you—only maybe it'll be too late."

" No, no, Mr. Fleming, I appreciate your advice, really I do."

" All right then. Excuse me now——"

" Just one moment, Mr. Fleming. There's something I ought to tell you. I'm worried about the way these Commoonists is spreading here in San Sebastian."

" The heck you say! What do you know about it? "

" You see, my sister—she don't really understand these things—no woman can—but she's kindhearted, and feels sorry for the poor, and these fellows get ahold of her. I don't want you to think that she is really bad, Mr. Fleming——"

" I know, I've heard about her."

" There's a fellow come to town that has a very bad record—a big, ugly-looking Dane, and they say he's a jailbird—I got a report on him from certain sources that I have. He was to my sister's at dinner, and I went there, and my sister ordered me out of her house."

"The devil she did! And what then?"

"Well, she has gave this man some money—I learned that from the bank. She's saw him since, and so has her servant—the woman is a Commoonist herself, or Socialist, or something. They're trying to incite vi'lence in this town, and you know how it is, with all this unemployment, and this man Roosevelt making the speeches he does, I just can't sleep nights for worrying about it."

"I know, Len, I get reports too, and it don't look so good. But I wouldn't worry too much about this town, if I were you. Believe me, we know everything that's going on, and there ain't going to be any strikes, or any other trouble. You just go to sleep on that."

"You really think so, Mr. Fleming?"

"We'll hold 'em down, and nobody is going to murder you in your bed. What's the name of this fellow you speak about?"

"Sigvald Soren."

"How do you spell that first name?" Old Thee wrote it on a pad. "How did you find out about him?"

"Well, you see, I subscribe to the Better America Federation——"

"Oh, I see! Well, that's all right—but don't forget, Len, those fellows have to live too."

"How do you mean, Mr. Fleming?"

Old Thee smiled one of his rare smiles. "There are so many rackets in this world, Len, you won't live long enough to find out about 'em all. Just bear in mind that the worse those fellows make things look, the more money they'll get from you. Do you see the point?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Fleming——"

"All right. Run along now, and settle down and enjoy your money—try to realize that you're one of the luckiest devils in the whole world. You could find fifty million people that would like to be in your boots; no doubt a lot of them are trying. Good-bye now, I'm busy."

V

Theophilus Fleming turned to the telephone, and talked with those who were handling the threatened strike. He questioned them, made his decisions, gave his orders for the

day. Then he summoned a stenographer, meaning to dictate the letters which required his personal touch.

But first came the secretary. "Mr. Fleming, there's a man outside who is very urgent about seeing you."

"Who is he?"

"He says he represents the Self-Help Exchange."

"What's that?"

"A co-operative, he says."

"Never heard of it. What does he want with me?"

"He keeps insisting that he has to tell you personally."

"You know I don't see people that way."

"So I told him, Mr. Fleming. But he begs me to give you his card."

Old Thee took the cheaply printed card and read: "Sigvald Soren: Contact Co-ordinator: San Sebastian Self-Help Exchange." He was on the point of throwing it into the wastepaper-basket, when something stirred in his memory, and he glanced at the memo he had written on his desk.—"All right, I'll see that fellow. Send him in."

The secretary went out; and Thee opened the top drawer of his desk, and took out a thirty-eight automatic, and slipped it into the right-hand pocket of his coat.

Sig Soren came in: big, barrel-chested, with bulging arms. But Thee had a kind of bigness that was bigger; never in his life had Sig confronted a man of such size, and his knees grew weak. If he had known about the gun, they might have given way entirely.

The visitor held his hat in his hand, and when he bowed it was revealed that his wavy red hair was going on top. The wrinkles in his cherub's face were pushed back in a kind of grin, intended to register cordiality, deference, all the placatory emotions. He had need of them.

"Good morning, Mr. Fleming." He stopped, ten feet from the desk. His nerve failed him there.

"Well, what do you want?"

Out of the jungle came that tone; a million ancestral creatures helping to make it. Glaring at this intruder was a wrinkled old rhinoceros, with little red, piglike eyes, thick-lidded; the heavy head lowered, ready for a charge, the murderous horn aimed to pierce the intruder and grind him into dust. The soul of Old Thee was that of Fafnir, the dragon, fire-breathing guardian of the treasure since far-off ages.

Sig gave a gulp. "Mr. Fleming, I want to tell you about the self-help exchange we are starting——"

"They come here every day to tell me about new rackets they're starting." It was a deliberate technique. Hit 'em right between the eyes, the first crack! Knock 'em down and drag 'em out! Show 'em who's master!

Sig had need of the psychology he had been studying in mining camps and the forecastles of ships. He bethought him of the ancient military maxim, that the best defence is an attack. Since the old fellow wanted a fight, let him have it.

"Mr. Fleming, has anybody pointed out to you what is going to happen to American business when the working-men lose their skills?"

The old rhinoceros hesitated, and took another look at his antagonist. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that the young men aren't getting any training any more. The middle-aged are passing out; you can't keep up the modern tempo without fresh men, and presently you are going to find that the youngsters don't know how to work."

"Where did you get that?"

"I'm living in the midst of it all the time. I'm a working-man, and I see it. I can find you hundreds of young fellows right in this town that haven't done a lick of work since they quit school; they don't know how, and don't want to learn. They're living on charity meal tickets; they're being made into beggars and bums. If you said the word, I could fill this office with such fellows."

"Humph!" said Old Thee. "Humph!"—the last grunts of the rhinoceros before he drew back into his clump of thorn-bushes; the last flame-breath from the Fafnir-dragon before he retreated into his cave!

"Have a seat, Mr. Soren," said Mr. Fleming.

VI

So there was Sig, talking as man to man with the president of the Golden State Light and Power Company, and telling him about the Self-Help Exchange.

"It may not seem like much at the start, Mr. Fleming. We only held our first meeting a week ago, and we hardly know one another. But already we have a hundred members;

we could have a thousand in a month, if we could handle them."

"What do you do for them? "

"We're going to put them to work."

"How can you do it when there is no work? "

"There's plenty of work, Mr. Fleming; the trouble is, there's no money to pay for it. We're going ahead on a barter basis. At our first meeting, in Grace Methodist Church—Reverend Myers has been helping us—a member of his church got up and said he had a walnut grove that was dying, it didn't pay to take care of. We could grow vegetables on the land if we'd take out the dead trees. So, there's a job for a bunch of woodcutters, and there's firewood for families that have had their gas cut off, and are living in their homes without heat—women and children, and old people, some of them sick. It means something to get them firewood for the winter."

"Yes, but they can't eat firewood. What about food? "

"We have three men out now on what we call contact work, looking up trades. Yesterday I found a field full of cabbages. I talked to the rancher; didn't pay to pick 'em, they could rot right there. I said: 'Let us gather those cabbages, and pay you with our labour.' All right, what could we do? Most anything, I said, with a hundred workers, all sorts of trades. Well, the man's garage looked seedy, so we talked about that; the wholesale price for the cabbages against the contract price of painting a garage. We made a deal."

"Where you going to get the paint? "

"That's another deal. One of our men is working on it. He'll visit the paint stores—we need seventeen gallons, for that job and others, and can we find a dealer who will trade with us? Can we mend his car, or fix his garage, or his plumbing, or build something for him—anything that doesn't take cash. When we get going, we'll be trading all over the place."

"You think you can take care of a hundred families by tricks like that? "

"Even if they only get part of their needs, Mr. Fleming, they're working, and they keep their self-respect. That's something, if you care about human values."

"What are they going to eat while they get going? "

"They'll have to take their chances, as they do now. They'll get groceries from the relief people, or they'll dig in the garbage cans, like so many others."

"What you talking about, man?" Old Thee leaned forward; his heavy mouth hung down, and the two ropes under his chin hung loose. "You mean to tell me there's people in this town eating out of garbage cans?"

"Well, really!" exclaimed Sig. "Come with me any night in the alleys back of your big hotels and restaurants. You'll see a flock of 'em, men and women, old people too. They bring baskets and bags—they take the stuff home with them to the kids."

"My God!" said the president of the Golden State Light and Power Company. (Nine and one-half per cent dividends this quarter!)

"Garbage is not so bad, if it's fresh. Plenty of kids would be glad to get it. Ask the doctors at the clinics about the percentage of malnutrition—crooked bones, stunted growth, rickets—all that sort of thing."

"My, what a terrible thing, this depression," exclaimed the old man. Then realizing that he was letting himself be worked upon, he suddenly clenched his fist on top of the desk, and glared again. "Look here, sir, is it true that you have a criminal record?"

This at least was something with which no one could take the big fellow by surprise. "It's quite true, Mr. Fleming. I was a gold prospector in Alaska, and they had a slump—same thing as here, only the garbage cans were scarcer. I hunted a job as long as I could stand up. I was young then and I got awful hungry. When I couldn't starve any more I broke into a grocery store at night and carried off a sack of food. I served fifteen months for it. That's my record."

"You've gone straight since then?"

"I've never thought of it just that way, Mr. Fleming. I never felt like a criminal, I never had any desire to do anybody any harm. I found a job as a coal miner, and then I homesteaded, and raised a family in Alaska. Then I came to California and run a trucking business; now I'm helping this co-op."

"They tell me you've got a bunch of Reds down there. Is that so?"

"Honest, Mr. Fleming, I haven't an idea what their

politics is. I've only known them a week, and I ain't had time to ask. I know a lot of them is church people, and they asked Reverend Myers to pray for them. I imagine they're good Republicans, not thinking about a thing in the world but to keep alive."

"But you're a Red yourself? "

"I'm a Socialist, and a pacifist, if that's what you mean. I seen so much cruelty and suffering, I would give my life if I thought that would stop it. What I'm trying to do right now is to put people back to work. It seems to me our civilization is going to smash if we don't do that. I can't get over the idea, Mr. Fleming, that if the danger was explained to some of our businessmen, they would want to help." Poor old Sig, he looked so earnest, and his blue eyes glowed with such a light of conviction! If only he could get this great and powerful man to believe him!

VII

The president of the Golden State Light and Power Company was wasting a lot of time; and suddenly he got down to business. "Everyone admits the danger, Soren. The question is, what's to be done? What do you want from me? "

"First of all, Mr. Fleming, we want you to understand. We realize that we can't do business in this town without some friends. You can drive us out if you want to."

"I have no quarrel with you so long as you behave yourselves. But if you're going to start a centre of radicalism——"

"We said at the very outset, Mr. Fleming, we would have nothing to do with politics. We agreed we wouldn't ask any man his race or his creed or his party. That's their own affairs. Our purpose is work and self-support. We're a business organization, to make the unemployed men and women independent. There's nothing in that that any good American can object to."

"No, of course not—if you mean it."

"Well, we mean it, and we'll prove it to you and to everybody."

"I don't suppose you came here to give me a lecture. What else do you want? "

Sig couldn't help smiling. He had begun to realize that this old man wasn't really as fierce as he talked.

"We're going to give our lectures in action, Mr. Fleming. I'm here as a contact man, to ask you to trade with us."

"Trade for what?"

"I understand you own the Quinn Hardware."

"Who told you that?"

"It's generally reported, Mr. Fleming——"

"Well, I have an interest in it." Old Thee was a little ashamed of being in the hardware business; not because it wasn't aristocratic, but because he had got into it through going on a note, and he considered that a sign of weakness. In the panic of 1920 the business had gone on the rocks, and he had had to buy it to protect himself. He had made it a very fancy store—the Quinn Emporium, it was called—and he had made money up to 1930.

"What have they got there that you want?"

"Oh my, Mr. Fleming, about half the things in the place. But one thing right at the start—that is a dragsaw, so that we can cut up those walnut trees. There's going to be a lot of that kind of work, I mean woodcutting of one sort or another, and it looks like the quickest way to get on a trading basis."

Old Thee asked what the saw was worth. He didn't know much about the details of the hardware business, and thought of a saw as something that cost two or three dollars; maybe a big one might cost five or ten. It was a good thing he was an old poker player, so that he could hide his dismay when Sig said: "They have priced it to us at a hundred and eighty-seven fifty."

"You expect me to make that big a present to a bunch of strangers?"

"We made a rule at the very start, Mr. Fleming—we ask no charity. We want to render service for every dollar we get."

"What can you do for me?"

"You have to help us to figure it out. We can do any sort of repair work, or building; we can paint, fix roofs, clean up grounds——" Sig paused, hopefully; then he went on: "You have an estate, Mr. Fleming——"

"Yes, but I have men to keep it in order. You don't expect me to discharge men to make work for yours."

"No, of course not. But something extra—if there's a road to be graded—concrete to be laid——"

"Wait now." Thee thought for a bit. "I'll tell you. I'm buying a small place. I have no use for it—I haven't ever seen it; it belonged to a friend, and I'm helping to close out an estate. I expect the court to approve the sale this week. I imagine it's badly run down, because the man was broke. There'll be fences to fix, roofs, maybe painting, no doubt some dead trees to try your new saw on."

"Fine! Fine, Mr. Fleming! That's what I was hoping for!" Sig was lifted to the skies!

VIII

Old Thee enjoyed working out the details of a business deal; he took as much trouble as if it were for a million dollars. Sig realized that he enjoyed it, and played the game with the utmost gravity.

"Of course, you understand, Mr. Fleming, so far as concerns the materials, we just haven't any."

"I'll furnish the materials, and you do the work. But it's got to be good work, and the full money's worth."

"Realize our position, Mr. Fleming. When your company sends out a repair gang, it's young fellows you know, and have trained, and you put the job through in a jiffy. But we have hardly any organization yet; we don't know our men, what they can do, or how far they can be trusted."

"You trying to hedge on me now?"

"No, but I must tell you the truth. Most of our fellows haven't did a lick of work for a couple of years, and by the looks of them, they haven't had a square meal in that time. They won't be very fast workers."

"I'm not asking that. But I want it done right."

"It will be, Mr. Fleming, if I have to do it with my own hands."

"Well, you get in touch with Harry Franz, the superintendent of my home place. He'll show you the work, and agree on the rates."

"He can fix the rates, sir——"

"Nothing of the kind. You're going into business. You make your bargain and make it proper. He'll credit you for the work at the same rate he would pay anybody else."

"All right, Mr. Fleming, whatever you say."

"And now as to that saw. Have they got it in stock?"

"They said they could have it in twenty-four hours."

"I suppose you want it in advance. Is that it?"

"For two reasons, Mr. Fleming. We desperately need the wood, and the trading power it will give us. And then, if you trust us, and we make good, you'll like us better. You'll brag about us." A little bit of applied psychology, learned in mining camps and the forecastles of ships! It was Sig's best stroke, and it wrung a smile from the grim old man.

"All right, I'll take a gamble on you." He pressed a button, and his secretary came. "John, this is Mr. Soren, and I want you to give him a note to Quinn's, telling them that he's to have—what is that saw?"

"A dragsaw, Mr. Fleming. The teeth are inclined so that it cuts on the pull. It's a power-tool, and you can set it at any angle and cut anything in a field."

"That's a pretty expensive proposition. Are you sure you can handle it?"

"I've did some lumbering, sir; and we have a man who has ran a threshing outfit, and knows about all kinds of engines. Also we have a couple of mechanics—I don't know yet how good they are, but believe me, we'll take care of that saw."

"All right, they are to have a dragsaw, costing a hundred and eighty-seven fifty"—Old Thee might forget the name of a saw, but he would never forget an amount of money—"and it's to be charged to my account. Then get Franz on the wire."

"O.K.," said the secretary; and Sig made his bows and his thanks. "Some day I want you to meet Charlie Day, our Chairman, Mr. Fleming."

"One's enough at a time," growled the old man. "I'm dealing with you. Go to it now."

Sig went out; and Thee took the dangerous gun out of his coat pocket and slipped it into his desk drawer. There was a wry smile on his face as he did it. It was a joke on him; he would share it with no one.

The phone buzzed and he took the receiver.

"Hello, Franz. I've just had a talk with a fellow named Soren. They've got a thing they call a co-operative; they're trying to put some of the unemployed to work. I'm letting them have a dragsaw out of Quinn's and it's to cost a hundred and eighty-seven fifty. They've agreed to do that much work,

and I'm going to let them fix up that Harking place, and I've told this fellow Soren to see you and make the bargain with you. Take him out to the place and look it over and figure what there is to be done. I leave it all to you. You pay them what you would pay anybody else for the work; and then you see they do it, and no nonsense. Yes, a hundred and eighty-seven fifty, and you hold 'em to it—I don't want them to get the idea I'm running a charity bureau. Let 'em earn what they get—that's the only way to teach self-respect and character."

The busy magnate hung up, and was about to summon the stenographer; but something else occurred to him, and he pressed the button for the secretary. "John," said he, "I want you to write a cheque for three thousand for the account of my daughter Genevieve; and when I've signed it, you better let Robert take it down to the bank, because it seems she has overdrawn her account again."

IX

Sig Soren walked down the street, and if he hadn't been such a heavy man he would have danced on air. He went to Quinn's, and presented his order to the respectful salesman, and arranged for the saw to be delivered on the following day. He went to the place where he had parked his aged car, and got in, and didn't hear its rattles—any more than if he were driving in Thee Fleming's limousine!

He went to the place on South Verdugo Street, where stood the storage warehouse which had once been filled with paint. The co-op had rented it for thirty dollars per month, the first month's rent in cash, and the second in the shape of repairs to windows and roof. It was forty by ninety, which gave room for all sorts of small industries; the loft ran about half the length, and that would be the place for the offices. The walls and roof were of corrugated iron, and held no heat; but some day they would line it inside with building paper, or celotex, or plaster board, or something they would get in a trade.

When Sig arrived, three men were just putting up the sign, a grand long sign painted by themselves, and of which they were very proud. "S.S. SELF-HELP EXCHANGE"; and beneath it the word "CO-OPERATIVE." Sig stood across

the street and admired it. "Grand, boys! Grand!" Then, waving his two hands at once: "Boys, we've got the drag-saw!"

"What?" they shouted.

"Yes, Thee Fleming has let us have it. He's going to trade with us."

"Man alive! You don't mean it? Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Inside, they were putting up partitions; a little room at one side for the personnel officer, who would interview new applicants. The partitions were of dark red building paper, nailed onto shaky uprights. Meanwhile, the personnel officer—or rather three of him—were somewhere out in the middle of the warehouse, sitting on packing-boxes, and interviewing would-be co-operators who sat on other packing-boxes. Near by a young woman was working a mimeographing machine which somebody had loaned; running off blanks of the questions for the applicants to answer.

Here and there were stacks of things which people had brought in, almost everything you could think of: picks and shovels, chairs and tables, bedding and clothes, wire and rope, glass jars and kettles, a wood stove, an oil stove, boxes of nails, a wheelbarrow, a lawn mower. Once upon a time the American people had had money to buy such things; oh, yes, and automobiles, radio sets, washing machines, electric refrigerators; now they didn't even have money to run them or keep them in repair. They brought in loads, and some said they were gifts, and others said timidly that they ought to have credits for them, maybe they might be good for something to eat some day. In the latter case the piles had to be kept separate, with the owner's name on a tag, until they could be appraised.

The news about this worthy charity had spread in Grace Methodist Church, and people had rummaged in their attics and closets and brought a lot of clothing. Scotty Adams, the carpenter, had got his tools out of pawn—they were worth a couple of hundred dollars and he had borrowed thirty-seven on them. Now he was building some frames and putting hooks in them; the ladies were hanging up clothes, getting ready to clean and press and repair them. Pretty soon that corner would be the sewing section.

In another place two "jack-carpenters" were making an enclosed place, using mostly boards out of large packing-boxes

and chicken wire. That was going to be the commissary; they were proceeding in the firm faith that some day there would be food to be kept safe! In another place they were setting up an oil stove and a couple of packing-boxes, and calling it the cooking section—with the idea that some day they were going to make coffee and sandwiches for the workers at noon, and even bake bread and fry doughnuts.

In one corner old Jerry Mason was directing the making of an odd-looking contraption on the floor. It was apparently a harness made of rope. It was a harness for six creatures; or rather, it was six harnesses of different lengths, so that six creatures would be pulling in line. Somebody had brought in a plough but no horse, and so six able-bodied men were going to pull the plough, and a seventh was going to guide it. The first rains of the season had fallen, the ground was soft, and the quicker the "spuds" were planted the sooner there would be food for women and children.

Into this busy scene strode Sig Soren, co-ordinator of the contact section. "Folks, we've got the dragsaw! We'll have wood! And Old Thee Fleming is going to let us pay for it in trade." Then, without stopping to answer questions or receive congratulations, Sig rushed upstairs to the loft, or second story, where Charlie Day sat with half a dozen men and women of the headquarters section, drafting the various kinds of blanks they would need: receipts and orders and authorizations—records of many sorts for their complicated business.

What an uproar when Sig told his story! Theophilus Fleming! The most unlikely man in the whole city of San Sebastian! Charlie grabbed Sig by his two hands, and others pounded him on the back, and they all laughed and came near to dancing. The president of the Golden State Light and Power Company! And more important yet, the owner of the Quinn Hardware Emporium! "Sig, if we can get him, we can get anybody in this town! We're going to put it through, man!"

BOOK II: 1933

CHAPTER V

INDIGENT IDYLL

I

THE highway ran through a valley so wide and flat that it was like a plain. It ran straight for an indefinite number of miles, and all the way under a high arch of cottonwood trees. It being January, the leaves of the trees were a dark brown; the trunks were grey, and that set the colour scheme. The concrete highway was grey, and had been painted with a brown stripe down the centre. The underbrush at the sides was brown, and so were the cotton fields, and the dead plants of cotton, while the few late bolls on the plants were grey. The mountains which enclosed the valley were brown, and the brush on them was grey. It was a study for a painter of pastel shades.

But the thoughts of the travellers in the ancient flivver were not on natural beauty. They had had nothing but half a loaf of bread with some lard on it in the morning, and now the children were whimpering, and hard to repress. "Pappy, I's hongry! Mammy, when us gunna eat?" There seemed to be a great number of children's faces peering out of the flivver; but that was because they would crawl from side to side, over the baggage, and whine: "Pappy, reckon us could git some vittles in that there house?"

The flivver itself was of an age which might have fetched a price if it had been offered at the museum of its creator. But it was a long way from Detroit, and no one of its occupants had ever heard the word "antique." One of its running boards was missing, and two of its fenders were held on with wires. Its hood jumped up and down because the catches had rusted off. All four of its tyres showed the fabric, and mostly nothing else; its radiator cap was missing, and its windshield was patched with brown paper, glued on the inside. Its curtains

were full of holes, and flapped here and there where strings were broken. It had luggage piled on and tied, and it seemed to be solid inside with bundles and children, and one lean mongrel dog with his ribs showing. Such sights on the highway cause travellers to grin, and if they are young and gay, to call out something about the "boneyard."

There were six humans in the car; all of them gaunt and pale, and five of them silent and cowed, except for the feeble whining. Three ragged, tow-haired children had the back seat, with the dog, and bundles of bedding and household goods. In the front seat, next to the driver, a sad-eyed, weary woman held a two-year-old baby in her arms.

The father of this family seemed the only one who had not bowed to the bludgeonings of chance. He was as thin as the others, and as hungry; but he could still make jokes, and sing songs, and try to cheer the children instead of "whaling" them. Tied with two strings above his head was a banjo, and on occasions he would fetch it down, and toss back the straight yellow hair from his pale blue eyes, and begin stamping with one foot and wailing, "Oh, bury me not in the lone prairie!" Many a supper had he beguiled out of a cold and hostile world, and if he should lose that gift, the little family would be just one of a million that were doomed.

Most of the houses along the highway were built of adobe and occupied by swarthy Mexicans, a kind of people whom the flivver family were afraid of. The driver kept his eyes open for a white man's house of about the right size and appearance, not too grand and not too poor. Presently he saw a ranch-house, set far back from the highway in a grove of trees. It wasn't so easy to get "shet" of a feller when he had come a long way in. They drove, humbly, to the back door, and were greeted by the barking of a big dog.

The driver waited patiently, until the door opened, and a woman appeared. "Please'm, will that there dog bite?"

The woman called to the dog, which slunk back; and the man hopped out of the car—it was always harder to get "shet" of you if you were on your feet and talking lively. "Thank ye, ma'am. I'm scairt o' strange critters. I got dog-bit onst, an' I sho doan' want to git dog-bit agin."

"What do you want?" demanded the woman, far from cordially. Her house was not so far off the highway but that plenty of tramps came in,

"Please, ma'am, have you got any sort of chores that a feller could do that would pay fo' a bit o' grub? We doan' want to be beggars, ma'am, but we sho in a bad way. We're po' share-croppers from Lousianny; we got put out of our cabin, an' tryin' our best to git to Californy where I got a brother. We got fo' young'uns there, an' another one acomin', an' my woman's in a bad way without food. We ain't had nothin' this day but a bit o' light-bread and grease, ma'am. I can do any sort o' hones' work—I'll split cordwood, or mend fences, or clean out your henhouse. We're good people, ma'am, and the woman'll set right in the car an' tend the young'uns, an' they'll not make no mess fo' you. Or, if you please, I got a banjo in the car, an' I got a right smart talent fo' music, ma'am, an' the young'uns all sing with me—if hit would please you to hear some songs out o' the Red River country."

The speaker poured all this out as fast as he could, for he had learned that the more you get said without interruption, the better your chances. The woman looked at him, and then at the car, and at the faces of the gaunt woman and the young'uns, a heart-disturbing sight.

"Hit's somethin' po' folks like us kain't help, ma'am," pleaded the man. "Y' kain't git a livin' out o' cotton no mo'. Mr. Gridger he comes an' says: 'I kain't give you no mo' credit, an' I kain't feed ye, so put yo' duffle in yo' ole bus an' move on.' So if yo' kin jis give me any sort o' chores, ma'am——"

"My husband is away, and I haven't any work for you," said the woman; then, seeing despair in the faces of the half-starved children: "But I'll give you something to eat. Get out and come into the house."

"Oh, thank ye, ma'am, God'll bless ye, ma'am." The little family needed no urging, but climbed out of the car by such doors as were not wired fast or blocked with baggage. The oldest boy, eleven or so, held up the starving pet away from the big one, that he might not by any chance get "dog-bit." When they were all out, they remembered their manners—"grace before meat"; they lined up, and the father and leader spoke:

"Please, ma'am, this is the Jett fam'ly; Cristy Jett they calls me, an' in an' about Willow Chute, Lousianny, we was considered to have right smart talent. So if yo' please, we'll

sing one of our balletts, by way o' thanks fo' kindness in an hour o' need."

Without further preliminaries, Cristy Jett struck up and the others joined in, all save the dog and the two-year-old. Their voices were high and shrill, and some would have thought it a fearsome sound; but just as the flivver might have been purchased as an "antique," so the "ballett" was "folklore" out of the Red River country. Like little Tommy Tucker who sang for his supper, the Jett family wailed loudly:

" Oh, the moon was ashinin' on the river,
Where her lover went down to the sea;
An' her heart was lone
An' with sorra she moaned,
Oh, when will he come back to me?

Oh, red is the water on the river,
An' red was his blood 'cross the sea.
She weeps alone
With many a moan,
Fo' her lover she'll nevermo' see."

After this heart-warming, the woman took them into a spotless kitchen with linoleum on the floor, and a row of shining aluminum pots on the walls, and a table with a white cloth. No one of the "redneck" children had ever seen such magnificence, and they were awe-stricken. They took in silence the seats indicated to them, and sat staring, first at the bringer of the food, and then at the food, and then back to the bringer.

There came a loaf of "light-bread," and some butter, and a piece of cold roast, and a pitcher of milk. The woman cut the meat, and put some on each of the plates, and told them to pass the bread; the children were so shy, they waited until their own parents told them to go ahead; then they wolfed the food down, and sat in silence to see if there would be more. Bib, the oldest, used one hand to hold his dog in his lap, lest he should commit some impropriety in this elegant place. Dink, the dog, behaved just like the boy; making no sound, but following with his eyes every morsel of food which went into Bib's mouth.

Meanwhile, Cristy provided the sociability. "Hit's pretty hot here summertimes, I reckon, ma'am. Yes, ma'am, we have it pretty hot in Willow Chute; right cold in winter too. We git scads o' fog up the Red River; a body gits chills an' fever from hit. I reckon there's better places. They tell me Californy's a wonderful place; my brother Clem is doin' good there, leastways he was when he wrote me last spring. He stays in a town called San Sebastian. Ever hear of it, ma'am? Sounds like a mighty fine place. I been hopin' a long time to git to Californy, but I wouldn't ever took the chance, if Mr. Gridger hadn't turned us out. I see yo' got cotton in this valley, ma'am. We kain't git no price fo' cotton in our country—I say urn by way o' speakin', though cose hit ain't urn no mo'. Californy's gunna be urn now. I hear they got a song 'Californy, here I come.' I reckon I'll pick up a lot o' new balletts in Californy. Yes, ma'am, I made some of 'em up myself, but most I got from old-timers. I'll fetch my banjo, if yo' say it, an' sing you the one that tells about Ginrul Pershing an' the fair maid o' France.

"Yes'm, we had pretty fair weather this trip, we kain't complain. We had holes in the cabin too, an' hit leaked pretty bad. I ain't sho, but I figger we been on the road 'bout a month. This here Texas sho' is a big state. Took us two days to git into it, an' a month to git out! Folks is been pretty good to us. We had fo'teen chickens when we started; we traded 'em fo' gas, that helped a lot. Hit's been slow, but every time we moved hit's been west. I reckon to git to Californy befo' the event that is expected in our fam'ly, ma'am."

Mrs. Jett lowered her eyes at this delicate allusion, and the hostess proceeded to pour her another glass of milk. After noting again the yearning faces of the children, she went and got a second pitcherful. Poor creatures, it might be another month before they were properly fed again.

"I reckon us gittin close to El Paso, ma'am?" inquired Cristy. "They tell me they is some mountins beyond. Ain't never seed no mountins, none of us—not till to-day. Reckon hit gits pretty cold in the mountins nights. No'm, we'll stand hit; folks stand what they has to. We got some quilts along. Yes'm, we sleep places if folks lets us; if they doan', we sleeps asettn' in the car. When we git to Californy we'll git warm agin."

The longer the ranchwoman looked into the face of the timid and silent wife, so obviously near her time, the more filled with pity she became. She went upstairs and got an old coat, to keep Mrs. Jett warm in the high passes. "Oh, ma'am, that's too much," murmured the poor soul; it was the first time she had spoken, and the tears came into her eyes.

Cristy became so excited that he rushed out to the car, and got his banjo, and stroked it once or twice, kerplunk, kerplunk, to be sure it was in tune, and then lined up his talented family and sang for their hostess the ballett about Ginrul Pershing and the fair maid of France. It was a proper ballett; one is pleased to report that our national hero behaved in a chivalrous manner to the fair maid of France, and when he was forced to depart, she pined away and died. People were frequently pining and dying in the balletts of Cristy Jett. There was "The Dying Cowboy," "The Dying Ranger," "The Dying Soldier."

Cristy offered to sing a ballett about Guvner Huey Long and his "share our wealth" programme. That was a political one, he explained, and not everybody liked politics, but it was the way the starving share-croppers felt. The ranchwoman promised not to mind it, so the Jett family wailed the story of the people's champion campaigning in the backwoods behind two mules, and the people shouting: "The Kingfish is our man and share the wealth he can." The ballett ended with a promise: "All the bells shall ring, every man shall be a king."

"Yes'm, I see him onst," said Cristy, with pride. "They was a speechmakin' in Willow Chute, an' every man from twenty mile round come to hear him. He sho is a gran' speaker, but I hain't saw my share o' that wealth or any other, ma'am."

III

The time came for the leave-taking. The shy wild children were prodded until they got up the courage to say: "Thanky, ma'am," each in turn. Even Dink, who had got some scraps of food, made friends with the big dog. The last thing before they filed out of the kitchen, the ranchwoman got out her purse and pressed a dollar bill into Mrs. Jett's hand. "That's for gas," she said; "to get you over the Florida Mountains."

"Floridy, ma'am?" cried Cristy, greatly surprised. "Do we go through Floridy?"

"No," said the woman. "The Florida Mountains in New Mexico."

"Floridy's a right pretty place, they tell me, ma'am. I wished we could of saw it. Oh, ma'am, if everybody was as good to po' folks, we wouldn't have no trouble in the world."

So the Jett family loaded itself up, all smiles; the antique flivver began to rattle and shake, and it backed round, and with hands waving and dogs barking, they went down the entrance drive, and out on to the highway lined with cotton-wood trees.

They got their dollar's worth of gas in the city, and climbed into "the pass." The colour scheme changed from brown and grey; there were white rocks and white mountains in white sunshine. The radiator of the flivver boiled and steamed; they tied rags over the top to keep some of the water in, and slowly they chugged up and around and about through the Florida Mountains. They were warm inside and out, and happy; a meal like that would last them all day, and the memory of it would last them all the journey.

It was a lonely country, that corner of New Mexico, and southern Arizona from east to west. But also it was a kind country. There were not so many starving, and even "tin lizzie tramps" were human beings. People would take them in at night and let them sleep on the floor. If they were stranded in the mountains, a truck would stop and give them gas. Lonely miners, in cabins off the highway, would feed them on bacon and beans, and be well repaid with music. Every pass they came through, they were nearer to the Golden State.

At last came the great day, dreamed of for so long. Down at the foot of a grade, far out in a plain, a silver river wound; that was the Colorado, people said, and the other side of it was Californy; beyond those distant "mountins" lay a great ocean. The listless children came to life; even the skeleton dog gave a bark. Cristy "stomped" his foot on the floor of the car, and sang a very gay ballett called "The Poor Tucky Ho."

"When they go ahuntin' they call up the dog,
Run a ole hare in a ole holla log."

And he started to make up one about the golden pavements of the cities of Californy!

They crossed a bridge, and there was an inspection station, with officials in uniform. Fear smote them; did they keep po' folks out of this paradise? But no, it was just to find if they had any Japanese beetles, or black scale, or boll weevils, or whatnot. Had they any fruit with them? No, it would have been eaten long ago. The same with pecans—but the inspectors had to look through the luggage, revealing pitiful family secrets. At last they were turned loose, into the little desert town of Blythe; but they did not stop—with a gallon of gas left, they chugged their way out into the waste. They would get as far into Californy as they could!

When the gas ran out, they stopped, and on a lonely stretch of sand and rocks they got out and sunned themselves, and ate what scraps of food they had, and agreed that Californy air was grand. Cristy was interested in the matter of keeping pests out of his future home, and he bethought himself of certain ones which inhabited the hide of Dink. "Lend me that there comb o' yourn," said he to Mel, his wife; and she took the comb out of her hair, and he began to run it through the hair of the dog. When fleas showed themselves, he did not permit them to jump out upon the sacred soil of Californy, but crushed them skilfully.

Now and then the comb would encounter a more solid obstruction, a little round sack which was as if made of rubber, the size of one of your fingernails. That was a Texas cattle tick, with its head deeply buried in the hide of Dink; each sack was full of Dink's blood—and it was plain enough that he had none to spare. "I'd hate to bring them things into Californy," said Cristy.

"Doan' you reckon they got 'em here?" demanded Mel—it was short for Melody.

"They say they hain't got no pests atall."

"Us all got red-bugs in our hides," said Bib.

"Yeah, but they doan' git out alive," countered Cristy. "I dunno what becomes of 'em in there." As fast as he pulled a tick off the hide of Dink, he passed it on to Bib, who "stomped" it under his heel.

IV

Having refreshed themselves, and warmed the innermost of their bones, they began to figure on the next stage of the journey. Fast cars sped by on the wide pavement, and there

was nothing to be expected from them. But now and then came a truck, and Mrs. Jett seated herself beside the road, and whenever she saw a truck coming, she would stand up and wave a piece of rag; the young'uns would line up behind her, a sufficiently forlorn array.

Before long a truck driver put on his brakes, and drew up. "What seems to be the matter, folks?"

"Mister, I'm scairt we run out o' gas." It was Cristy doing the talking. "We come from Lousianny, where we los' our little cabin. We're tryin' to git to a place called San Sebastian, where I got a brother."

"Well, you're a long way from San Sebastian," said the driver. "I'll take you to the next station."

It was an old story to him, no doubt. He climbed out, got a chain out of a box, and hitched one end to his rear axle, and the other to the front axle of the flivver. "All right, folks, hop in."

Cristy took his steering-wheel—it was an old story for him too. There was a jerk, and they began to move, and faster and faster they sped down the highway, under the powerful compulsion of the truck. Three or four miles, and then, alas, there was a gas station, and the driver turned in, and stopped, and unhitched them. "All right, folks, there ye are. Good luck."

"Thanky, mister, thanky," chorused the Jett family.

And now the problem of the man at the gas station! When he learned that they were "broke," he patiently helped Cristy to push the car out of the way. There was no work for anyone out here in the desert, he said. He didn't need any balletts, because he had a radio. There were stranded families coming into California every day.

The Jetts had to wait for a traveller who would give them two bits for a ballett, or for mercy's sake. They waited half a day, but few cars stopped—business was bad, said the gas man. He was willing to talk, for his job was a lonely one; gradually he forced upon the Jett family the realization that the Golden State was just one of forty-eight which had been caught in a depression. There was no gold whatever in its sidewalks, and it was overfull of unemployed and hungry and frightened people, wandering here and there, looking for something different, and finding the same thing.

It was, as the truck driver had said, a long way to the city

of San Sebastian. The man got them a map—he had five things that were free, he said, water, air, maps, conversation, and the use of the ladies' and gents' rooms. He marked their destination with a pencil, and explained the route; deserts, plains, mountains, cities and towns—they realized with sinking heart that it might take them as long as it had to cross the state of Texas. Moreover they would better be careful how they did any begging, or even stopped in towns unless they had money to spend; the police were getting tougher and tougher on the swarms of "indigents" who poured into the state to escape the cold weather.

A man drove in for gas, and Cristy told his sad tale. But the man only manifested annoyance, and told them they had better go back the way they had come. A grim specimen of Californian was he, a big rancher, burned brown by the desert sun; he took a look at the rattletrap car, and said to the gas man: "We spend good money advertising this state in Eastern newspapers and magazines, but it looks like the wrong kind of people read the advertisements! "

More cars, and at last one that had women in it. The whole Jett family advanced to the attack, Cristy armed with his banjo. "Please, folks, we're a family o' po' sharecroppers that has lost our home in Lousianny, and if we kin git to San Sebastian, we'll git food and shelter from my brother. Please yo', ma'am, we're out o' gas, and stuck here in this desert with no food. We're not beggars, but hones' folks, an' have some talent fo' writin' an' singin' balletts. From a miner in Arizony we jes' learned a new one called 'The Dyin' Californian,' which may interes' folks in this here state. We'll sing it, hopin' it may be wuth the price of a gallon o' gas."

Kerplunk, kerplunk! Without delay—since gas station attendants are fast, and modern cars even faster on the pick-up—the Jett family intoned the plaintive words of the dying Californian:

"Listen, brother, catch each whisper,
'Tis my wife I speak of now;
Tell, oh, tell her how I missed her,
When the fever burned my brow."

There were many stanzas, and the driver of the car interrupted before the end. "Sorry, folks, but we're in a hurry. Here's four bits to help you on your way."

He drove off amid a chorus of thanks; and since the coin was more than enough to pay for two gallons, the station man made it three. Away they went across the desert, and over the pass through the Chocolate Mountains—which, alas, were named for colour and not for taste!

That night Mrs. Jett was begging food at the back doors of ranch houses, and getting it—since there were few women who could refuse food to one in her condition. Next day they were in a town in the Coachella Valley—and stuck there with a blown-out tyre; a problem which took them three days to solve, with the help of a constable and some relief workers. The tyre was past repair, and a second-hand one would cost a couple of dollars, and there was no work by which this sum could be earned, and the laws against begging were supposed to be enforced. Finally they got the tyre and a gallon of gas at the expense of the county relief authorities. The towns of California were handling "transients" upon the same formula as the rest of the towns of the United States: give them just enough to get them to the next town!

V

Such was the odyssey of the Jett family, over mountains and through valleys and along highways. As one ballett was like another ballett, so one mile was like another mile, and one day like another day. Since there was no kind of jail provided for small children and pregnant women, they were free to enjoy the far-famed and universal sunshine. Since no one could endure to have them stay in one place, they got, sooner or later, their gallon of gas. They drove hungry as long as they could stand it, and then they received enough food to make it certain that if they died it would be of something else than starvation.

The day came when on a highway sign they read: "San Sebastian, 78 miles." Their singing became more lusty, and their begging more inspired. They counted the miles; and when they came to the outskirts of the city, they were in a state of exaltation which blinded them to reality. The sunshine seemed more dazzling, the flowers gayer, the paint on the hotdog stands brighter. For this was the dream-city to which they had been struggling for two thousand miles; it was the seven golden cities of Cibola merged into one;

it was the Sunshine City of the Golden State!

The truth was that it was exactly like other cities of America. The highway came into the town through a slum, the landscape consisting of railroad tracks and yards, dingy shacks, warehouses, cheap eating places. Presently there came a strange sight, a big lot in which rows of concrete pipe were lying, big joints of pipe that came up to a man's shoulder; it appeared there were men living in this shelter, for groups were standing or sitting about, and stove-pipes sticking out of some of the ends, and much laundry spread out to dry. But even that did not alarm the Jett family; it seemed to them novel and exciting. An empty and clean sewer pipe would be welcome after sleeping so many nights in a flivver.

"Please, mister, how does a body git to 2247½ South Almayo Street?" They counted the blocks, and then the numbers, and when they reached the 2000 block they were as thrilled as if Brother Clem had been waiting with a brass band and a banquet.

It was a working-class neighbourhood with dingy shacks and two-party houses: 2201 was the corner. Cristy knew how to read, and he read aloud, so it was easy: 2233, 2241—and what was this? A blank space, with a concrete foundation, blackened on top; a few blackened posts, and a lot of black ashes—a house had burned down! There was a rear house on the lot, also burned in part, and empty. They looked at it, bewildered. The flivver was rolling on, and they saw the number of the next house, 2253. They went on for several more houses, with the confused notion that 2247½ might be stuck in somewhere out of place.

But gradually the painful truth forced itself upon them. The house they were looking for was the one that had burned. And what became of people when their houses burned down? Their minds were a blank on that.

Cristy got out and rang the bell at 2233. A toothless and shrivelled old woman came to the door. She was deaf, and it was made harder yet because a little dog was barking madly at her heels. The house next door? Burned down a month ago. Where were the people? "Schultz," said the old woman, "their name was Schultz." Where did they go? She shook her head. "What was it? Shett? Jett? Never heard of him."

Cristy went to 2241 and rang. A gaunt woman with a

dust-cloth tied round her head came to the door. No, she didn't know where the Schultzes had gone. She had never heard of such a person as Clem Jett. Maybe he was a boarder; the Schultzes had had several boarders at different times; they came and went.

VI

So there they were, facing grim reality; no Brother Clem, and the City of San Sebastian was just the same as any other city. The state of Californy was the same as Lousianny—a cold and hostile place, in which they took their chances with a million others in the same plight. They had travelled two thousand miles to get nowhere, and now they would move on again—to nowhere.

"Mebby some of the stores knowed him," suggested Mel; and Cristy took that hope to the nearby grocery, and the eating joint, and the pool hall, and the beer place in the next block, and the filling station on the corner. Clem Jett? Never heard of him. What did he look like?

"Lean feller," said Cristy, "looked like me." The people looked him over; a smallish man, with face and neck having been exposed to much weather; the name for him at home was "redneck." He had a weak but kindly face, prematurely wrinkled, and yellow hair looking as if it had been cut with his pocket-knife. No, people said, they had never seen anybody who looked like him.

Cristy went back to his family. What next? The young-'uns were whining. "Pappy, I's hongry. Pappy, when us gunna eat?" No use to beg in a neighbourhood so poor. He got in, and drove to a street with a car track and rows of stores. He would try in a restaurant; they sometimes had food they were going to throw out, and would as leave wrap it in a newspaper and throw it at you. Cristy parked the car by the kerb, and set forth to try his luck.

The family sat waiting, and presently down the street came a policeman. He looked at the car, and then came to it. "Don't you know you got no business parking in this place?"

"No, sir," said the startled woman.

"Don't you see there's a white-painted kerb here? That means a loading zone."

"No, sir, we didn't know, sir. My husband he'll be back pretty quick."

"Where do you come from?"

"All the way from Lousianny, mister. We're po' folks an' we didn't know."

"Do you know how to drive?"

"Yes, sir, a little bit. But I ain't never druv in traffic."

"Well, there's not much traffic here; you'll have to move the car unless you want me to give you a ticket."

"Oh, no, mister, please! Where shall I take it?"

"Take it around the corner, off the main street; anywhere you don't see white or red or yellow paint on the kerb."

"But, mister, how will my husban' find me?"

"I don't know about that; but you can't stay in a loading zone." He looked into the car. "Can't the oldest kid wait here till your husband comes?"

"But how will he know where I go, sir?" Poor Mel Jett was not very bright, and to have a problem like this thrown at her deprived her of all reason.

"You take the kid with you and show him where you're going to park; and then you come back and leave the kid here to wait for your husband. See?"

"All right, sir." But then another problem. Mel hardly knew how to mention it. "Mister, excuse me, please. But I'm in a condition—I kain't turn that starter."

It was one of the old-style cars that had a handle hanging down in front, and you had to throw it over. "All right," said the policeman. "Got your switch on? And your gas lever down? Don't let her kick back on me."

He gave the handle a whirl, and the engine roared, and after many anxious looks behind her and before, Mel started into the street, and turned at the corner, and drove along, looking for a vacant place where there was no white or red or yellow paint.

Such places were not plentiful; so she turned at the next corner, only to find that here also was a busy street. She turned into the next side street, and then around another corner. Here she found a parking place that looked all right; but the trouble was, she had become confused; she was not used to big cities, and all these "squares," as she called them, looked alike to her. She didn't notice the names of streets, because she could only spell out letters slowly, and she didn't try unnecessarily.

She now had to get back to the place from which she had

started. But when she began to turn, Bib insisted that it was a mistake; he was at an age where he was interested in street sights, and he had been watching, because it would be his proud duty to lead his father to the place. The mother insisted that she was right; there was the car track, and there was the white-painted kerb in the middle of the block. But Bib said there were such painted kerbs in all the blocks, and this was the wrong street.

"Don't you 'member, mammy, they was a candy store, an' I said it was the Choclit Mountains in the windy?" Yes, sure enough; Bib had wanted to get out and have a closer look at the goodies; and now the candy store was gone!

So there was Mel, terribly frightened by the confusion of city traffic, wandering from this street to that, trying to find a candy store with a white-painted kerb in front, and glass dishes piled with caramels and chocolate creams in the window!

VII

Cristy Jett was hunting food for his family. In the first restaurant he met with a cold refusal, and then in a second one. He went on down the street, and there was another place—it looked almost too fancy, but he was made bold by the hunger of his loved ones, and went in. To the elegant lady at the cashier's desk he said, with infinite humility: "Please, ma'am, would there be any chance of a po' man gittin' a bit o' vittles to take to his young'uns?" As the woman sternly eyed him he went on: "'Cose I'll go to the back door to git it, ma'am——"

"Sit down and wait," said the woman.

"Beg pardon, ma'am?" said Cristy.

"Take that seat right there," said she, indicating a table.

Oh, wonderful! Cristy sat down, hat in hand. The woman signalled the proprietor. "Here's a man asking for some food."

"Do you expect to pay for it?" inquired the other.

"No sir, mister," explained Cristy. "Y'see, we come from Lousianny, lookin' fo' my brother Clem, and it seems I kain't find him, and we got no money——"

"All right, wait there," said the man. He went to the back part of the café, to a little booth, and telephoned the police department. "This is the Elite Grill, and there's a

beggar here. You asked us to call you whenever that happened. Yes, he's waiting."

So, while Cristy waited patiently for what he thought would be a grand "hand-out," a police car drew up in front, and a man in plain clothes came into the restaurant. "Where is he?" he inquired; and the woman nodded to Cristy.

"You been begging in this place?" the man demanded.

Poor Cristy rose to his feet, trembling so that he nearly had to sit down again. "Mister, I jes' asked fo' a bit o' vittles fo' my young'uns——"

"You're under arrest," said the man. "It's against the law to beg in this town."

"Oh, but, mister!" wailed Cristy.

The man moved back the lapel of his coat, revealing a silver shield. "Come quietly, and nobody's going to hurt you."

"But, mister, I got a wife an' young'uns."

"Where are they?"

"I left 'em down the street, mister, parked in our car."

"Oh, you got a car, have you?"

"Yes, mister."

"Well, come outside and we'll talk about it." He took his prisoner to the police car. To the driver he said: "This guy says he's got a car down the street with a wife and kids in it."

"Where is it?" demanded the other.

"Mister, yo' gunna take them to jail too?" Poor Cristy was on the verge of weeping.

"No, if you got a car we'll put you in and start you out of town. Where is it?"

"Hit's about fo' blocks back thisaway, mister. Y'see, we come all the way from Lousianny, lookin' fo' my brother Clem, an' he——"

"Put him in," commanded the driver. Cristy was placed in the back seat with the man who had taken him into custody, and the car turned and started in the direction he had pointed out.

"Mister," said the prisoner, "please tell me. That there house my brother Clem lived in is burnt. How do you reckon I gunna find him?"

"You won't do any more lookin' in this town," replied the policeman—"not if you know what's good for you. You'll

be lucky to escape thirty days in the city jail."

They came to the block where the car had been. "Hit's there," cried Cristy, pointing, "over nigh that there sign——" And suddenly the words died on his lips, and his heart seemed to die too. The place where he had expected to see the car was empty!

"Well, which is it?" demanded the policeman.

"Mister, hit was right in that there place. Hit's gone!"

"Well, if it was there it was parked illegally. Did you park it?"

"Yes, mister, jes' fo' a minute or two——"

"Didn't you see that white-painted kerb?"

"No, mister, I didn't notice hit. Back in Lousianny——"

"Have you really got a car, or are you tryin' to string me?"

"Cose I got a car, man! I got fo' young'uns, an' a wife that is expectin' any minute now. Us is po' share-croppers from Lousianny, an' I come here lookin' fo' my brother Clem. We been nigh on to three months on the road, an' we come to the house—hit was 2247½ Almayo Street—an' the house is burnt up an' they hain't nobody ever heard tell o' my brother Clem Jett. I lef' my car in that place——"

"What did the car look like, buddy?"

Cristy described it; and the description set the officers to laughing, and helped the poor share-cropper over a little of his terror.

"Mister, my wife is expectin' any minute. You reckon they coulda took her on that account? What could they did with her?"

"Take her to a hospital," said the other. "You don't have to worry about her. You're the one that's in trouble."

"But if I lose my fam'ly, mister? Fo' God's sake, if I lose my brother, an' then my wife and young'uns——"

"Better take a turn around the block, Jake," said the plainclothes man.

They drove around that block; they drove around several blocks, looking for a 1914 flivver with only one running-board, and two fenders tied with wire, and a windshield patched with brown paper. The farther they drove, the worse became Cristy's anxiety, and the more certain the officers became that it was genuine. It wouldn't pay to arrest a vagrant and have a family of five and possibly of six on your hands; no, mani-

festly, public policy required that that family should get started on the way to the next town.

But the search was in vain; and finally they said: "All right, buddy, we won't arrest you, but you better drive to the station with us, because if your wife turns up, how are we going to find you? Your best chance is to stick by us, because, without any money, she's pretty sure to be reported in sooner or later. And maybe the captain will send out a call for her. Maybe she's there now, for parking in a loading zone!"

VIII

Mel Jett continued to drive about the streets of San Sebastian, looking for one with a street-car track, and a white-painted kerb in front of a candy store. She was becoming more and more panic-stricken every moment; she had lost her husband—and suppose, in this huge strange city, she should never be able to find him again! Suppose the gas in the tank should run out! Suppose she should blunder in the traffic, and hit some other car, or some person!

She was driving down a street, just one more street with endless "squares," each looking like the last; dingy dwellings, warehouses, sheds, filling stations, grocery stores. She wanted to turn to the left, and Bib was insisting that she turn to the right. He, too, was frightened; she had shouted to him to shut up, and now he was weeping, the tears making grimy streaks down his face. The baby was crying, Dink was whimpering, everything had gone wrong.

Suddenly a pain smote her; a dreadful pain that made her dizzy. She turned white, and clutched the steering-wheel, and could not repress a groan. She had to stop the car in the middle of the street. "What is it, mammy?" cried the young'uns.

The spasm passed, and she was able to control herself. "Nothin'," she faltered. "Mammy's all right." She looked to the kerb, and fortunately there was a vacant place; she turned in, and shut off the engine.

She knew that another spasm was coming, and she waited, biting her lips and clenching her hands. The young'uns must not know. "Mammy's all right," she insisted again.

She looked at the buildings; there was a big one just ahead; a sign on it, but the words were long and she did not try to

spell them out. She saw a woman enter, and that was enough. Where there was another woman, she could go too.

"Mammy's goin' inside there, an' mebbly git some vittles. You wait here; mammy'll come back." She got out, and walked as fast as she could to the door. Another spasm; she had to clutch the door-handle and cling tightly till it passed.

She went inside. It was a huge place, with many people in it, and many things; it looked like some kind of store, but Mel was in too great confusion to give thought to it. She saw a woman near the entrance, and ran to her. "Oh, ma'am," she cried, and then whispered into her ear. The woman gave a cry: "Oh, my God!" She looked down at Mel, and then exclaimed: "We'll call a doctor!"

"Oh, ma'am, I doan' need no doctor!" protested the other.

"What? No doctor?"

"I ain't never had no doctor, ma'am. I couldn't have no man near me. All I need is to be to myself." She looked about her wildly. At one side was a place partitioned off, a sort of little room, with a door; she ran to it. There were chairs, a table, a man sitting at the table, a couple of women. Mel darted in and sank into one of the chairs. "Please ask the gentleman to go out!"

The woman took the bewildered man and led him outside. Another spasm of pain; Mel became faint, having had practically no food all day. "Help me to lie down," she whispered, and lay on the floor.

One of the women came running with a quilt, and sought to put that under Mel. It was an old and rather faded specimen of what our grandmothers knew as a "crazy quilt." "Oh, ma'am, that's too pretty!" objected Mel. She wouldn't lie on it. "No, ma'am, 'twould be a shame to ruin thet. Kain't yo' git me some blanket, somethin' I kin wash afterwards?"

They brought a piece of oilcloth, and that was good, she said. They wanted to put an old mattress under the oilcloth; all right. They told her they had phoned to the hospital, but she was horrified. "I won't go to no hospital! I won't have no man tech me!" she cried. "All I want is some woman by me. An' a bucket o' hot water, please."

They had an old stove, they could get some hot water; one of the women ran out to attend to it. They were all in an

uproar, and Mel sought to calm them. "Sorry to make so much bother, ma'am. Please doan' be scairt, they come easy with me. The first one was hard, but I had fo' of 'em now."

The pains seized her, and she could not keep from crying out. That worried her, and she apologized. What would the men outside be thinking? She would have worried more if she had known that the walls about her were nothing but paper.

There were half a dozen women in the room. They all wanted to do something, but there was nothing they could do, apparently, except make confusion. "Ain't nothin', ma'am; jes' a little time's all I need." She turned her face away, writhing with the pain. One of the women went out and drove the startled men up to the other end of the building, in the interest of decency.

Pretty soon Mel said: "Them's the bearin'-down pains. Somebody hole my hand, please." There was a young woman in the room, with a kind, grave face, and rather reddish hair. She took the outstretched hand; but Mel said: "Yo' ain't strong enough, miss; hit takes a pow'ful han'."

"I'm pretty strong," said the other. "I grew up on a ranch." Mel seized her hand, and pulled against it, and the other winced. She never dreamed that such pressure could be exerted by a frail woman.

"I tole yo', miss," said Mel. "Hit takes a big woman, one on each side. Did I hurt ye bad?" She saw there were tears running down the other's face.

"No. It's just that I'm upset."

"'Tain't nothin' to be sorry fo'—less'n hit's that we're women. I'm all right, miss—hit'll come quick now. What's yo' name, miss?"

"Mabel Saugus," said the other.

"Saugus?" said Mel. "Thet's a right pretty name. I'm sorry to come abustin' in on yo' like this——"

Another spasm cut short the apology. The pains would leave Mel white and almost fainting; yet, however feebly, she could not stop apologizing. She wouldn't let the kind Miss Saugus come too near her, because it might spoil her pretty dress. "Hit must'a cost a right smart lot o' money, Miss Saugus. Please, some lady thet's got a wash dress help me." This set the other to crying again, and Mel couldn't understand why.

IX

The moan of a siren was heard outside, and an ambulance drew up in front of the building. A young doctor, handsome in white duck, came running in, carrying an instrument case. He arrived just at the moment of climax; in time to pick up a puny redneck infant by one foot, and dangle him aloft, and slap him what seemed very cruel slaps—to a person like Mabel Saugus, who had never before been a watcher at the gates of life.

The infant began to yell, and the doctor said, fine, and then fixed up his navel cord, and turned him over to the women with the bucket of hot water. In deference to poor Mel's ideas of modesty, they held something in front of her face while the young doctor was attending her; and presently he pronounced her "fit as a fiddle." If he had known that he was dealing with one of the Jett ballett singers, he might have said "as a banjo."

There she was, with a six-pound boy—her third boy, she whispered, faintly. And now, what were they going to do with her? The hospital was crowded and couldn't take her, said the young doctor; but Mel said she wouldn't 'a' went to no sich place nohow. She'd be up to-morrow, she avowed; and when the women protested, she said she had always got up the second day. "I got fo' other young'uns; an' who's gunna look out fo' 'em?"

Where were the other young'uns, demanded the women; and learned to their dismay that they were in the car outside. Two or three women rushed out, and there was the flivver-load of little Jetts, now in a dreadfully grimy state with all the tears that had been trickling down their cheeks. They were borne into the big building, wailing, "I want my mammy!"

"Your mammy's all right," said one of the kind ladies. "She'll be here soon."

"Is she gunna fetch us some vittles?" demanded Bib.

"Are you hungry?" asked the kind lady.

"Cose us hongry. Ain't had nothin' yit to-day."

Somebody rushed out for a bottle of milk and a loaf of bread; and there were the four Jetts running a race with one another. When they had finished everything in sight, they asked again for "mammy," and one of the kind ladies said: "Your mammy has brought you a little baby brother."

The reaction to this was realistic. "What?" said Bib. "Another one?" And then with a look of disgust: "What's the good o' that?"

"Oh, don't you want another brother?"

"Cose not. Us kain't git vittles fo' what us got now."

The problem of what to do with the family was still being discussed. One of the women said she had a spare room, and would give them a place to sleep, at least for the night. Then Mel, in feeble whispers, told how she had lost her husband; someone volunteered to notify the police, and ask them to find him. If they couldn't, the newspapers surely would; for the story of the baby born in the co-op was going to be a "headliner." The reporters had found out about the ambulance call, and a couple of them had come, wanting all the details, the names of everybody concerned. One had a cameraman with him; so Mel's head had to be propped up with a pillow, and the infant placed in her arms, in order that there might be a flashlight photograph.

The more the reporters heard about the case, the "bigger" it seemed to them. One of them went to the phone and told his city editor about it—"a pippin," was his professional opinion; a family travelling all the way from Willow Chute, Louisiana—the reporter thought it was spelled Shoot, and Mel couldn't tell him any different. What the depression was doing to the share-croppers of the South, and how they had earned their way by singing ballets, and the addition of six more to the population of California! Also the story of how Cristy had been lost—a mystery story, and who would find the lost father and return him to his "young'uns"?

The reporter wrote down from Mel's feeble whispers the details of her husband's personal appearance. Then something she said brought out the story of the long-lost brother—it was a double mystery story! The San Sebastian *Morning Enterprise* would broadcast a call for Clem Jett, as well as for his older brother Cristy. They must have another picture of the Jett family, the four young'uns sitting at the table in the Self-Help Exchange, having their first meal in twenty-four hours.

As it turned out, it didn't take until morning to find Cristy. He was sitting right in the police station when the telephone call came in. He learned that he was the proud father of another boy, and that several cameramen were waiting to take

a picture of him. The policemen, not indifferent to their share of the glory, offered to drive him to the co-op; and there followed one of those bombardments of flashlight bulbs which are a part of public life in America. Cristy had to be photographed beside his wife and his new baby; then he had to pose with the kind policemen who had rescued him; then with his other young'uns eating another lot of bread-and-milk. His banjo was brought, and he was asked to pose and show how he earned food and gasolene all the way from Louisiana.

Nobody ever had to ask Cristy twice for that. He lined up the three young'uns; the cameramen, whose business it was to know drama when they saw it, lined up a score or more members of the co-op as a background. It was exactly like a scene from grand opera, where all the blacksmiths at the forge or all the peasants in the field cease their work and stand in a row and sing. Cristy Jett was in his element; with all the grace he was accustomed to display when calling the figures of square dances, he announced:

"Folks, we'll sing yo' the ballett o' 'The Dyin' Cowboy.' " Kerplunk, kerplunk, kerplunk!

"Ye sons o' Columbus, your attention I do crave,
While my sorrowful ditty I tell."

The flashlights went off quickly, but the ballett took quite a while. It was received with so much applause that Cristy, the proudest and happiest flivver tramp that had ever come into the state of California, announced that he would next sing them "Dandoo," a very old and popular ballett in a lighter vein. Kerplunkity-plunk!

"There was a little man, he lived in the West,
Dandoo, dandoo.
There was a little man, he lived in the West,
Ham bam gingo.
There was a little man, he lived in the West,
He had an old woman that was none of the best
With a ham bam berry—winkeye doodle jerry—
comingo calla callacum collingo."

X

Later, when the excitement had died, Cristy sat talking with a man named Pete Shaver, who had just come in from

work. Pete being from Texas, it was easy for them to understand each other. "Brother," said Cristy, "what is this here place we're at?"

Pete, the ex-thresherman, explained that it was a co-operative. Cristy had never heard that word, but he found it easy enough to understand the idea of a lot of people getting together to work and to trade. What did you have to do to join? When the other said you just had to be willing and able to work, Cristy said: "I'm jined right now."

But Pete wasn't sure; they had been going only about a month, and they had no food, and a man with a wife and five children would be a problem.

"But we gotta live somehow, ain't we?" argued Cristy. "I kin work, and my woman's as good as the nex' one; them two boys, they kin chop cotton and pick cotton like they was men."

"They won't let 'em work round here," answered the other. "They make 'em go to school."

"But how kin they go to school if they ain't got nothin' to eat?"

"It don't quite make sense," said Pete, "but that's the law. Didn't you have to send 'em to school back home?"

"We was too far away, an' they'd 'a' got stuck in the gumbo." He thought for a bit. "'Cose, I'd like right smart to have 'em git some schoolin', but I got to keep 'em alive."

"Well, we'll talk to the personnel department and see what can be done," said Pete Shaver, who now held the post of coordinator of the wood section. "It'd be different if we had anything to spare, but we're just gettin' by as it is."

In good old Southern style, they put the problem off till the next day; and as it happened, the next day brought its own solution. The Jetts, who had been what the state classified as paupers and indigents, became persons of social prominence and even of means. The two morning papers came out with long stories about them, and photographs of the wife and baby, and the husband with the singing children, and even the 1914 flivver in which they had crossed the continent. The telephone began ringing at seven-thirty, and motor-cars began rolling up to the door. The first one was a shiny limousine, driven by a chauffeur, who entered, carrying in front of him the fanciest "layette" you could imagine—a baby basket all done up with white flounces and pink ribbons,

and piled into it enough clothing for quintuplets.

Then came an amiable old gentleman with a big basket of fruit; and then a lady with a bouquet, tied with a ribbon with a little envelope attached, and in the envelope a cheque for ten dollars. And then a grocery wagon, with an order which had been telephoned; a box of groceries so big that the man could hardly carry it.

So it went all day long. Mrs. Jett, in the home of one of the co-operators, held levee all day, and showed her baby to half a dozen visitors at a time. Cristy, playing the host in the co-op, spent most of his time telling his story over and over, and showing visitors his flivver, and taking them and the young'uns out into the yard behind the building, where they could sing ballets without being a nuisance to nobody.

The result was that before the end of the day there was half a ton of food of one sort or another, and clothing enough to outfit a ship's company. That was the way with the American people. A million babies were born to poverty every year, and no one gave a thought to it; but let one case get into the papers, and catch people's fancy and touch their hearts, and the family would be buried under an avalanche of oatmeal and rice and beans, and oranges and avocados and walnuts, and canned tomatoes and peaches and soup, and strawberry jam and sweet pickles and chocolate, and blankets and overcoats and underwear, and oil stoves and ice-cream freezers and radio sets.

Cristy Jett was a poet and an artist; that is to say, he had always believed in the pot of gold at the foot of the rainbow, and when he found it, he was sure he would find a dozen more. If ever he had a dollar, he spent two, or gave them away. And here he was, with all this flood of wealth; and these folks who had been so kind to Mel, and were nearly as much in need as himself. There was a place called a "commissary," with nothing in it but cabbages and peppers and turnips, and very green-looking oranges, and small-sized walnuts. A body couldn't live very good on stuff like that; so, said Cristy: "yo' jes' put them things in there and let the folks have 'em, and if yo' want to give me credits, all right, but what I want is a chanst to work like all the rest." When they protested that this was too much, he said: "Gee whollipus, ain't us got a whole roomful o' stuff over there to the house? We're like to be crowded on to the street by hit all."

The climax of an absolutely perfect day: in walked a gaunt but wiry young fellow, with a red neck and straight yellow hair, the very "spit an' image" of Cristy Jett, and he said: "Where's that there brother o' mine?" Cristy saw him and yelled, "Well, if hit ain't Clem." They fell into each other's arms and shouted so as to disturb the work of the ladies of the sewing section and the baking section; they slapped each other on the back and danced crazy capers all over the place.

"Where was yo' at?" cried Cristy; and Clem said that he had seen it in the papers, a feller showed it to him, down where he was astayin' in a place that was called Pipe City, a field that had a lot of empty sewer pipes in it, and men slept there——

"Why, us seen that place, comin' into town!" cried Cristy. "An' us thinkin' mebbe yo' had got burnt up!"

Cristy turned to the others who had gathered round. "Folks, this is my kid brother, Clem, an' now there's two of us to jine the co-op! We make a team, because Clem plays the fiddle—an', folks, us all gunna lay off this night an' have a ole-fashioned hoedown! We'll put out some o' them fancy vittles, an' let the world know that the Jett fam'ly is come to Californy! Seven Jetts, big an' little! Whoopee!"

CHAPTER VI

ST. HELENA

I

ON a sunshiny morning late in February a young man was driving a runabout into one of the canyons back of San Sebastian. The tree-lined road curved past the gates and hedges of one great estate after another. Presently the driver came to a large pair of bronze gates, with a concrete porter's lodge beside them. He turned in, and blew his horn, and a man came out, glanced at him, then opened one of the gates, and greeted him politely as he drove by.

The private driveway was lined with deodars, and went past well-kept lawns with peacocks and deer upon them. It swept around, and climbed, and ended in a circle in front of

stone steps; several cars were parked here, and the young man placed his in a vacant spot, and then went up the steps, carrying a violin case in his hand.

He was a fair-haired young fellow, of studious appearance; the cut of his clothes was not that of the occupants of such a manor as this. He looked at the wide-sweeping terraces, set with an array of roses; when he reached the level of the stone-paved loggia, he stopped to gaze at the view of the city and the bay, a sight which never failed to thrill him. He was young, a musician, hoping to be a composer; he thought, if an artist could live in a place like this, if he could have beauty like this always before his eyes—what wonders he might perform! But for some reason the world did not often favour its artists in that fashion.

The young man turned, and before him was a white stucco mansion, its walls and porches covered with bougainvillæa and other flowering vines. He stepped on to a wide porch, and as he approached the door a servant in livery opened it, and he entered a living-room of size. At the other side was a fireplace depressed in the floor, with a log fire burning and cushioned seats about it. Oriental rugs covered the floor, and here and there on the walls were heads of trophies from Asia and Africa.

At one side were windows opening to an inner court, and near one window sat a group of three musicians with music stands before them, and a violin, a viola, and a cello in their hands. The new arrival greeted them, put his instrument case on a chair by the wall, got out his violin, and took his seat in the fourth and last of the chairs. They sat in conversation until a door at the end of the room opened, and a man in livery entered, and stood holding the door. At once the four musicians rose and stood at attention.

There entered a man of short stature and stoutish build, just past middle age. He wore an unusual costume for these days; a green military coat, cut long in the back; knee breeches of white silk, stockings of the same material, and low shoes with gold buckles. His dark hair was cut carelessly; on the right side one lock was rather long, and twisted across his forehead. On the breast of his coat he wore a large gold star, and carried in his hand a three-cornered hat. Behind him followed half a dozen gentlemen of varying ages, four wearing costumes of similar character, and the other two dressed as Americans.

Half-way into the room, the man with the gold star paused, and bowed gravely to the musicians. "Good morning, gentlemen."

All four bowed in return. "Good morning, sire." They remained standing until the man had taken his seat in front of the fireplace. Then the entire company seated itself and the musicians began to play.

They played a delicate and lovely composition, the andante from a symphony which the young musician had transcribed for a quartette. The master of the house listened attentively, following the rhythm with a slight indication of one finger. Peace and serenity possessed him like an enchantment; and when the last strain died, he sat for some time in silence, then in a low voice addressed his companions: "Gentlemen, such music tells us what life may be. I find myself irresistibly impelled to compose words for it; they say themselves. Do any of you find that?"

"Often, sire," said one of the company.

"I have words for that opening theme." Not singing, but in the time of the music, and with the same accent, he recited: "And slowly—and gravely—we tread through the stately measure—and so shall our days be ordained."

"Excellent, sire!" cried a voice. "You should have been a poet."

"It is a strange thing to contemplate, gentlemen, what our lives might have been, had we cultivated other talents. Should I have made men happier? I often wonder—knowing within myself what I might have been." He paused. "Do you know, I have a feeling that the man who composed that music will go down the ages with me. He composed one of his symphonies in my honour, I am told, and then repudiated me when I took the crown. He did not understand. Few can understand the urgencies which confront one who has the destinies of nations in his keeping. But history will vindicate me—the future will understand what enemies surrounded me, and what steps were needed to keep order and prevent reaction. Is it not so?"

"Yes, sire." The words came from several of the men seated about him. "Of course it is so. History will vindicate you."

"What think you, Las Cases? Would I have made a poet?"

"Never for a moment could I doubt it, sire," declared an emphatic voice.

"Ah, you seek to comfort me in my days of affliction. You are kind, but you do not deceive me. What about you, Bertrand? I made you governor of Illyria; and now you take charge of my kitchen! If I could compose verses, would you praise them?"

"How can I tell, sire?" was the reply. "If the verses were good, I should say so."

"Ah! And if they were bad, then you would condemn me to live in a garret on a little oatmeal? But could my fate be worse than it is, gentlemen? Who would not barter food for liberty? Who would not give up meat and wine—to escape having to hear the name of Sir Hudson Lowe?"

"Yes, sire."

The speaker became suddenly agitated. He clenched his fist and shook it in the air. "I denounce that man to the world! I appeal to the future, I present my case to the court of posterity. In a converted stable, with the stench of manure in my nostrils I sleep—and with rats racing about my room. Would you believe it, gentlemen, this morning I found a rat in my hat—in this hat which I hold before your eyes!"

"Sire," said a voice, "let us recall the wisdom of another great poet, who pointed out to us that it is useless to kick against the pricks."

"You speak well, my dear Montholon. I strive to learn patience, but it is not the virtue out of which my fame was made. I sit in this household, surrounded by secret agents and informers; knowing that I cannot receive a visitor without danger of treason, I cannot step out of the door without spy-glasses being trained upon me. I say to my soul: 'This too will pass; this too can be endured.' I say to posterity: 'See what an emperor can fall to! I, who closed up the chasm of anarchy, and put an end to chaos! I, who ennobled the peoples, and recognized the talents, and gave laws to the world!' I say: 'Behold me on this black, volcanic rock, suffocated by tropical heat, mildewed with the dampness of incessant fogs, with a mortal disease preying upon my liver——'"

"I beg you, sire——"

"I know, gentlemen, I excite myself. But my time grows

short. The future must know the whole story. Montholon, be patient with me."

"At your command, sire."

"I wish to dictate—I must finish the story of my book of laws, my civil code which I designed to end the chaos of the world. Have you your notebook?"

"Yes, sire; but pardon me if I point out that the musicians——"

"I know it; but this story presses upon my mind. Let them wait." Then, to the quartette: "Thank you, gentlemen. Be so good as to step outside; I see the sun is shining, and whatever else we may lack in St. Helena, we have a view." Turning to the rest of his company: "Gentlemen, you have your Emperor's permission to withdraw. Montholon, you will remain."

All but one of the company went out, either to the porch or to other parts of the house; and as they went they heard their master's voice, in swift and impassioned declamation:

"I wanted to found a European system, a European code of laws, a European court of appeal; there would have been but one people throughout Europe, if Napoleon Bonaparte had had his way."

II

Of the two men in ordinary clothes who had been sitting by the fireplace, one went on to the porch, and seated himself in a chair and began to smoke a cigarette. The musicians also came to this porch; and the young violinist began to watch the other man, and presently went up to him. "I beg pardon," he said, "but didn't I see you a couple of weeks ago in the Self-Help Exchange?"

"Possibly," replied the other. "I was called there in that delivery case."

"I thought so," said the musician. "I happened to be there also."

"A very curious story. Whatever became of that family?"

"Oh, they're getting along. You see, the public read about them, and sent in all sorts of gifts. They have a little home to stay in; and Cristy Jett's lost brother turned up."

"I read that too. It made quite a charming story. Something in the vein of *The Vicar of Wakefield*."

"I gave it a name in my mind," said the violinist. "I called it Indigent Idyll."

"You should have been a poet," said the other—"like our friend inside." Then he added: "Have a seat, won't you?" and pointed to the chair by his side. "My name is John Cass. I am a doctor."

"My name is Leslie," said the other, taking the chair.

"What was that music you played?" asked the doctor.

"The andante from Beethoven's first symphony."

"A lovely thing; and our friend's words fitted it."

The two men appraised each other as they chatted. The doctor saw a young artist, of twenty-two or so; sensitive, not very well dressed. "A nice chap," he thought; "all wrapped up in his music, and probably has a hard time getting along. Hair needs cutting."

The other saw a man several years older; well set up, with broad shoulders and narrow waist, as if he had been an athlete, and now had a good tailor. His dark hair was cut exactly right, and his little dark moustache had a fashionable tone. "Belongs among the snobs," thought the young artist. Aloud he said: "Are you going to assist with this case?"

"No, it just happens that I am a friend of Dr. Mellen's, and he invited me to see it."

"A curious case," said Leslie. "At least, it seems so to us musicians."

"Medically speaking, it is one of the commonest," said the doctor. "I suppose there are more victims of schizophrenia who imagine themselves Napoleon Bonaparte than any other one person. An obvious method of enlarging the ego. It is common also among statesmen and big business executives who have not quite gone over the border."

"The outcome of Napoleon's appeal to posterity!" said Leslie, with an ironic smile. "He would be flattered if he knew it." After a pause he added: "What makes this case seem interesting is the fact that the victim is a multi-millionaire."

"That, too, is not so rare as you might imagine," said the young doctor. "A lot of these rich families run to insanity. Apparently human nature cannot bear the strain of power. I know several cases in this state; one got into the papers a few years ago—there was a lawsuit over the custody. Fortunately there cannot be any dispute in this case; the patient's father

made Dr. Mellen the sole trustee. Do you know about the family? "

"I've heard only a bit here and there."

"They're big steel people in the East. This is one of the grandsons—a repressed boy who was studious, and wanted to be a historian; he concentrated on Napoleon, and on Napoleon's son, the poor l'Aiglon. He had an unhappy love affair—he was not allowed to marry the woman he wanted. So his mind retreated into this fantasy."

"I come here every day and see bits of it," said the violinist. "It's curious how real he makes it."

"He's an actor who has only one role. Dr. Mellen has handled the case with great skill. In the beginning the patient wanted to command his armies in the field; and when he is forcibly restrained, he becomes terribly upset and takes up the notion that he cannot eat normally—or rather that the normal way to be fed is through the nose."

"Good heavens! "

"Rather awkward, you can imagine. So the doctor has persuaded him that he is on St. Helena; whatever he is not permitted to do is put off on the wicked governor of the island, Sir Hudson Lowe."

"I have heard that it costs two hundred thousand a year to maintain this establishment," said Leslie.

"It is possible. They have two physicians, and a psychologist, a secretary, and a steward, besides the attendants, and servants, and gardeners and chauffeurs—to say nothing of the musicians."

"The musicians are not a very large item," said the other, with a smile. "But it's a way to keep alive through the depression, and we're glad of it, believe me."

"I suppose musicians must be having a hard time," said the doctor, kindly.

"I heard a remark the other day," said Leslie: "there are two kinds of musicians in California, those who are working sixteen hours a day for the movies and the radio and those who are slowly starving."

"Well," said Dr. Cass, "I might parody that by saying that there are two kinds of physicians: those attending the millionaires and those unable to collect their bills."

III

They had quite a while to chat, and ultimately the talk turned to the place where they had previously met. The doctor had come into the co-op and gone out again without having a chance to ask anything about it. Now Leslie told him how it worked, and the doctor manifested interest.

"But what use have they for a violinist?" he asked.

"It's complicated," said Leslie, "like almost everything they do. It happens that I know a lady who has a good deal of money, a Miss Saugus."

"I've heard about her."

"And there's a little boy, a son of one of the co-operators, who has a rather fine musical talent. Miss Saugus gives some money to the co-op, and they give me credits, and I give the boy violin lessons."

"I see," said the doctor. "But what do you get for your credits?"

"So far they haven't very much. I had my car fixed once, and now and then I take home some wood for our fireplace. But they have the use of some land, and very soon I expect to get fresh vegetables and later on fruit. Besides that, they are getting up a concert for me."

"How do they work that?"

"Well, you see, they have a lot of space in that warehouse, and they want to have meetings, but they have only a few chairs. They have found a man who has two hundred folding chairs, but he has to have part cash. So they put the chairs to work right away to get the cash to pay for themselves."

"Are you such a drawing card?"

Leslie smiled. "It would be truer to say that I'm an excuse for selling tickets. They have over a hundred members, and that represents quite a ticket-selling capacity. The tickets are only fifteen cents; if they manage to fill all the chairs, that is thirty dollars, quite a sum to get out of poor people in these times."

"And what do you get out of it?"

"As a member of the co-op, I'm supposed to be paid at the standard rate of a hundred points an hour."

"What are points?"

"It's rather funny, we don't know what they are, except

that they're what you get a hundred of. At the beginning we decided that it would make bookkeeping easier if the credit units were figured at one hundred to the hour. We called those units points, until we had time to agree on a name; since then nobody's had time to think about it. When we buy things on points, we figure a hundred points as fifty cents; so I suppose a point is half a cent."

"So assuming that your concert lasts two hours, you get a dollar for it?"

"No, they figured I would have to practise for the concert, and rehearse it; so I'm to get a thousand points, and the accompanist is to get five hundred."

"Very ingenious!"

"Well, it isn't only the credits that I get. It means something to a young musician to have somebody listen to him. It's practice before an audience; and you never can tell what may come of it. There are always some leisure-class people who take an interest in a thing like this co-op. That's how I met Miss Mabel Saugus."

"Humph!" said Dr. Cass. "That might be something for a young physician to think about."

"It would be if he had any spare time."

"Time?" said the other, with a wry smile. "A physician can be as busy as he pleases, if he doesn't care how many bad debts he accumulates. But you know how it is; a doctor has to drive a fairly good car, and has to wear a good suit and have it pressed; so he simply has to find some patients who are able to pay their bills."

"But you have a position with the hospital, haven't you?"

"It's a part-time one; and they figure just as you do about public appearances—a young doctor has to have someone to practise on. If you get enough out of it to carry you from day to day, you're supposed to be satisfied."

"Well," said Leslie, "it's this way in the co-op: they have a lot of poor people, and of course they need a doctor who will work for points. They can do all sorts of things for you—mend your roof, or clean up your grounds—"

"But we live in an apartment," laughed the other.

"Then have you a fireplace?"

"Steam heat."

"Then you'd have to wait till the vegetables are mature."

"Too bad they can't get up a public performance for me," said the doctor.

The other thought for a moment. "Why not? Why couldn't you give some lectures on health, the care of children, and so on?"

"I'm not much of a speaker," answered the doctor. "I wouldn't have the nerve to charge even a hundred points an hour for that."

IV

A servant came and invited Dr. Cass into the house. He was gone five or ten minutes, and then came out and rejoined young Leslie. He was laughing to himself. "It seems that I am not acceptable as a visitor," he said. "I look like a spy!"

He explained the difficulty in the life of this California Napoleon. He liked to receive visitors, to have the attention of new persons; but in the game he played, these visitors must always be Englishmen—because the cruel Sir Hudson Lowe would not allow others to see his prisoner. And now and then the prisoner would decide that one of them was sent there for the purpose of reporting his humiliations to the outside world. "So it was I who broke up the music this morning," said the doctor.

"You're too good-looking," said Leslie; "too leisure-class."

"Thanks," said the other. "I suppose it's this hairbrush moustache I wear. Anyhow, I'm through, and so are you for the day. Dr. Mellen asked me to tell you that there would be no more music. I hope you're not paid by the hour."

"No," smiled the other. "This is not on points."

He explained to the other musicians, and then said to the doctor: "By the way, have you got your car?"

"No, I came up with Dr. Mellen."

"Then perhaps you would let me take you to town."

"I was going to ask you if you would be so kind."

"Surely. On the way back, we pass one of the jobs the co-op is doing, and you might be interested to see it."

"Aha! You are scouting for recruits?"

"No," said Leslie, with a smile. "That is the job of the contact section. I'll send one of them after you."

They got into the car, and drove down the tree-lined drive,

and through the bronze gates. "I'll tell you something that may interest you," said Leslie. "You probably have a number of people owing you money in this city."

"Alas, who hasn't?"

"And maybe you owe some."

"It is possible." This with a dry smile.

"Well, the co-op is working over an idea to swap debts."

"How do they work that?"

"Let's suppose you give us a list of all the persons who owe you money, and a list of all your creditors. We go to them and explain the plan, and get them to give us lists; we go to those persons in turn; and sooner or later, on some one of those lists, we find one of the names we started with, and so we close the circle, and all the persons in the circle can wipe off an equal amount."

"I may be dumb," said Dr. Cass, "but I don't get you."

"Well, to make it simple, let's take three persons. You owe your landlord a hundred dollars; the landlord owes the corner grocer a hundred dollars; and the grocer is a patient of yours, and owes you a hundred dollars. It is plain that each of you three can cancel the debt, and you don't have to pass any money."

"I see that."

"Well, it would be the same thing if there happened to be a hundred persons in the circle. All you have to do is to find a person who owes a sum to a debtor you have already listed, or a person who has a claim upon a creditor; then you have a circle including all the names in between the two."

"But the amounts wouldn't be the same."

"If the amounts are more than a hundred, you'd simply credit one hundred on account. If in some cases the amount is less than one hundred, you make it up in goods and services; the landlord gives you credit on the next month's rent, or the grocer gives the landlord more groceries, or you give the grocer a promise of medical services."

"By Jove, that's a novel idea!" exclaimed the doctor. "Are they going to do that?"

"It's one of the plans we're figuring over. It helps people to realize how production is stifled by a lack of cash such as we have in this depression."

"What would the co-op get out of the deal?"

"We would have to charge a commission for the service,

say fifteen per cent, which is what a collection agency gets. We'd take that in trade, which would make it easier for the whole crowd. Almost everybody has something that a group like ours could use."

"You're getting me interested," said Cass. "I never gave much thought to these matters before."

V

They had come out of the canyon, and were driving along a wide shelf overlooking the city. Along the road were smaller places, residences with gardens and sometimes fruit orchards. "If you're not in a hurry," said Leslie, "I'll show you this place where the co-op is working."

"What is it?"

"It belongs to old Mr. Fleming, the president of the Golden State. You know of him?"

"It happens that I had dinner at his home last week."

"Oh, I say! Then you can't be exactly starving."

"I didn't starve the day I had the dinner, that is sure. But don't fool yourself—the rich will invite you to their homes, if you're reasonably good-looking, and know how to talk, and to make up a four at bridge; but when they get sick, they're not trying to help any struggling young doctor. They send for the highest-priced man in town."

"I suppose that's so. I know that when they want to entertain their guests, they consider they have to pay a thousand dollars to some visiting celebrity. I don't say I can play as well, but I do say that if I could, Mrs. Pat Fleming would never know it."

"We seem to understand each other very well," laughed the doctor. "What about the place?"

"Well, we had to have a dragsaw for cutting wood—the first kind of work we could get; and one of our contact men persuaded Old Thee to let us have it out of the Quinn hardware. We're paying him back by cleaning up a place of his. It's nothing much to see, but I find it interesting, because I've followed the thing from the start, and I know the fellows who are working at it. Almost anything that human beings do is interesting, if you know the inside story."

They turned into a driveway where a rather large bungalow stood back from the road, with three or four well-worn cars

parked in front of it. The doctor saw a couple of men working on the roof, and a couple more in the flower-beds in front of the house.

Leslie stopped, and they got out. "Hello, Mason," he said, to one of the gardeners. "How are things going?"

"Fine, Walter, fine. We're making a new place of it."

"It is easy to see the improvement. Dr. Cass, this is Jerry Mason, co-ordinator of our gardening section." The doctor greeted an old man, very thin, and with symptoms of what he recognized as jaundice; a serious old fellow in blue jeans, who said he wouldn't shake hands because he was covered with soil.

"And this is Brother Lawrence." The figure out of a stained-glass church window had laid aside its white robe temporarily, and was working in undershirt and shorts. But the curling brown beard and benevolent countenance were sufficiently striking. "Good morning, Walter," said he. "I am pleased to meet you, Dr. Cass."

"This happens to be the doctor who delivered the new baby of the Jetts'. I am trying to tempt him to trade with us."

"Let him send all his patients to work out here," said Brother Lawrence, gravely, "and he can come join us too. No doctors would be needed."

As they strolled around the side of the building, Leslie remarked: "Maybe you would call that a case like our Napoleon. But this one's notions are harmless; he loves the plants, and the plants love him, he says; he is happy working in a garden, and it doesn't cost two hundred thousand a year to keep him out of mischief. That other old fellow, Jerry Mason, was told by the charity people that he is unemployed; but you see he is working effectively."

"As a medical man, I have an impulse to give him some attention."

"You should see the vegetable garden he has planted on some land that has been loaned to us—the Simmons tract. He hated to quit even for a few days; but we have to pay for the saw, and we had to do the work when Mr. Fleming's superintendent ordered it."

Behind the house a man was replacing broken pickets on a fence, and another was painting them. The doctor was again introduced; and as they walked on, Leslie said: "That young chap, Dick Atkins, has had I don't know how many years

at the university, and can't get anything to do."

"Can't you find some brain work for him?"

"He says they have ruined his brains. The truth is, he's worried himself ill over his personal problems, and outdoor work is what he needs for a while. He'll find his place in time."

They strolled on, and Leslie told curious stories about city-bred fellows going back to work on the land. They were unbelievably ignorant; having no idea of the simplest tools. One grown man had been afraid to go into a field where there was a cow; another had run from a turkey gobbler, and had been troubled by the sight of crows in a field, and of hawks in the sky.. Said one to Jerry Mason: "I never knew that birds had shadows. How strange!"

Farther on, two men were working at cleaning out what appeared to be rabbit runs. Leslie knew them all, and they called him Walter. He introduced the doctor, and as they went on, he told who they were and how they had come into the co-op. "That fellow Strubb was a filing clerk for a big corporation somewhere in the East, and when he came here he was jailed as a vagrant."

"I should think you could use such a man in your office."

"You don't realize how many white-collar workers are down and out; and we can't let our office overhead eat us up. First we have to get tools, and then food. That big, half-bald fellow, Rendant, is an expert baker, and we hope to have use for him some day. But at present we have to let the women do the baking, and put him at work to help pay for the dragsaw."

"They seem to be working all over the place," remarked the doctor, looking about.

"We're paying a fancy price for that tool. I think it's here to-day, and you can see it work."

VI

They strolled down a back lane, and into an orchard. The grass comes with the winter rains in California, and the orchard was covered with a thick carpet of the brightest green. But the trees were not yet in bud, and it would have taken an expert eye to see that many of them were dead. At the far end were several men working. "There's the saw," said Leslie.

"And by the way, the Jett brothers are working with it."

Dr. Cass had seen their pictures in the paper, and here they were; two under-sized and lean fellows, clad in badly patched working-clothes; red-necked, "jimber-jawed," and with straggly hair. They were as busy as beavers, under the supervision of another man not very different in build from themselves.

"This is Pete Shaver, co-ordinator of our wood section. Pete, this is Dr. Cass."

"Pleased to meet ye, doc," said the ex-thresherman from Texas.

"And, Cristy," said the musician, "this is the doctor, who came to the co-op to help your wife."

"What?" cried Cristy. "Yo' doan say!" His face lighted up, and he came with outstretched hand. "I sho am pleased, Mr. Doc. Hit was good of yo'. My wife, she was kinda upset, y' know, she hain't never had no man aroun' at sich a time, but hit was all right."

"How is she?"

"Doin' jes' gran'; the hull family doin' fine." Cristy wrung Mr. Doc's hand with surprising energy; and then he said: "I like yo' to meet my brother Clem." So there was another hand-wringing.

"I'm trying to persuade Dr. Cass to trade with the co-op," said Leslie.

"Man alive, I hope he do! Hit's a gran' thing, mister. Us never heerd o' no sich of a thing, but looks like it saved our lives."

"I want the doctor to see how this saw works," said Leslie, to cut short the eloquence.

"She's a gran' tool, mister. She eats up the wood."

"You'll excuse us if we go right to it, doc," said Pete Shaver, boss of the gang. "We're paid by the hour, so we got to keep at it."

"Go on," said the doctor.

The dragsaw was a construction with a gas engine, and was built somewhat like a buggy, with two small metal wheels, and two metal shafts out in front. When it was laid to a tree, the wheels, which were on pivots, were turned crossways, holding it firm. Pete adjusted the saw against the base of a standing tree, and pulled a lever, and it started to eat into the tree.

Meanwhile, the Jetts threw a rope over a branch, pulling the tree sideways, away from the saw. Down it came, in a jiffy; the saw blade was taken out, and another bolted in, and the wonderful tool started to cut that tree into lengths. The blade moved so fast you could hardly follow it with the eye; it ate right down; and presently, instead of a tree, there was a row of logs, of fireplace length, and a lot of branches which another workman tackled with an axe. The dragsaw was moved on to the next tree, while a man with a truck fell to loading the cut wood.

It is always interesting to watch a gang of men at work, adjusting their movements one to another. It is always interesting to watch a piece of machinery doing with swift efficiency the labours of many men. It was different from a doctor's work and a violinist's, but still it was brains applied to human problems, the conquest of matter by mind, and they stood longer than they had intended, moving from one tree to the next. It was pleasant out here in the bright sunshine, with the mountains for a background.

"Here's the process which has laid so many millions of men on the shelf," said Leslie. "Their work is done by that swift steel saw, and the little engine which pumps it back and forth."

"Yes; but what are we going to do about it?" replied the other.

"You can see that here too. These men own the tool they are working with."

"What difference does that make?"

"It's the whole theory on which this co-op is built. If this tool belonged to a private owner, and he hired the men, the wood would belong to him, and he would take it to a shed and store it, until he had a chance to sell it for more than he paid for it. The supply would pile up, and presently we'd have overproduction and hard times, and the men would be on charity. But after we get this saw paid for, the wood we produce will be ours, and it won't have to be sold for a profit. It will go into the commissary, and be gone before night. We can't keep anything at all in our commissary."

"I follow you that far," said the doctor. "But it is easy to imagine that this gang and this saw might produce more wood than all your members need."

"Of course; but that would be a blunder of headquarters.

It would be their job to distribute the labour, and produce less wood and more potatoes."

"But suppose you have too much of both wood and potatoes?"

"Are you assuming that our co-op will produce a surplus of all the material needs of its members? That is obviously a long way off. When that time does come, the people will reduce their hours of labour, and enjoy life. They may want to listen to music, or perhaps to have their health looked after."

"Very interesting," said the doctor. "I've always thought of such ideas as socialistic."

"And then what? I watched this co-op for a while, and I made up my mind I wasn't going to be bothered by labels. Here's a group of people meeting their immediate needs by practical actions. What we are doing is just as scientific as that saw—I mean, it's an adjustment of means to ends. It's a lot of human beings put together in a certain way, to accomplish a certain purpose—just as the parts of the engine are put together to work in a certain way. If it is all right to invent machinery, why isn't it all right to invent new social forms?"

VII

Two men appeared, coming up the path from the house. "By Jove, here's Mr. Fleming," said the doctor.

Sure enough, Old Thee, coming to see how the work was being done; and at the same time getting fresh air and exercise, as prescribed by his higher-priced doctors!

"Good morning, Mr. Fleming," said the lower-priced one.

"Why, hello, Cass! What are you doing here?"

"I have a young friend who wants to interest me in this co-op, to give them medical services."

"Not a bad idea. They seem to be a decent sort."

"This is my friend, Walter Leslie," said Cass. "He's a very fine violinist."

"Howd'y do?" said the magnate, with a nod. "Have these people got time for fiddling?"

"Leslie is giving a concert to raise some money for them. He'd be honoured if you would come."

"Yes, surely," said Leslie.

"Maybe," said the old gentleman. "When you have so

much money, you are certain that everything is a trap—and generally you are correct. "This is Franz, my superintendent. This is Dr. Cass." They exchanged greetings.

"I came to see how the work is going," said Thee, and he went right to it.

Did the working crew know that this was the owner of the place, and the man who had trusted them with the treasure? Maybe so, maybe not; anyhow, they knew it was company, and they were on exhibition. They had come to know the job by now, and they put that saw on the wood, and the sound of the whirring was music to which they jumped. The axeman swung at the branches like one possessed, and the man with the truck threw the logs in as if he had to catch a train. It gave one a restful feeling to stand there in the bright sunshine and watch other men work so capably.

"Who gets that wood?" demanded Old Thee; and when the super told him that he was to get it, he said, "It can be longer, for my fireplace."

"Make it a foot longer, Pete," said the other; and Pete saluted with one finger, and said "O.K." The job had already been figured, and if the wood was cut longer, time would be saved.

"Handy tool, that," commented Old Thee. Did it occur to him that it might be dangerous to let working-men get hold of such a tool and use it for themselves instead of for him? If so, he gave no sign. Wishing to be sociable, he said: "Well, Cass, what do you think of the market?"

"I didn't notice, Mr. Fleming."

"Lucky fellow, that doesn't have to care what happens to stocks!"

"I've heard there is trouble."

"Trouble? It looks like the end of the world. The banks are closing in half a dozen cities. It's that man Roosevelt, and the incendiary speeches he's been making."

"The people asked for him, Mr. Fleming."

"They took four months to elect him, and they'll have four years to repent in. I don't know how we're going to live through it. Imagine it, the fellow is threatening to start a dole, and give everybody money without their having to work!"

They began strolling back towards the house; and all the way Old Thee was telling the collective troubles of America.

Cass said: "Politics is out of my line, but I can tell you this for sure—it's better for you to stay out here in the sunshine till it's over."

"I know—all you doctors are in a conspiracy to let me go bankrupt."

"My advice is disinterested," smiled the young man. "There will be no bill."

"It's God's truth," said the magnate, "I'd like to put on overalls, and go over there and help that old fellow fix the fence. But what would become of Golden State? That's the way with all the men I know; they're chained to their jobs—and not fighting for any eight-hour law, either. They slave to develop the country and protect its property interest, and every mother's son of them produces ten times what he gets. If he don't produce it, he don't get it, believe me!"

"Yes, Mr. Fleming," said the doctor, meekly.

The old man turned to his superintendent. "Looks like these fellows are working all right, Franz."

"Some of them are a little slow, sir; you can see they're old fellows. But I think they're doing their best."

"Well, that's all right; the place will look very decent. I don't suppose there'll ever be a market again, with this crash that's on us now; but property has to be kept up. Will their work pay for the saw?"

"More than that, sir. I supposed you wanted everything in order; there'll be at least a hundred dollars over."

"What do they want for that? Cash?"

"No, sir, they're willing to take some of the wood, or some more credit at the store."

"All right. But don't let them get the best of us. This is business and not charity."

"Quite so; I understand, sir."

"Well, good-bye, gentlemen," said Thee, as he got into his car. "I must get back to my treadmill."

After he was out of hearing, young Leslie said to his new friend: "A funny thing, the mind of the rich! When that old boy said that every mother's son of them produces ten times what he gets, there were just two words I wanted to say to him."

"Napoleon Bonaparte?" guessed the other; and they both laughed. "I couldn't say it, because I have the hope that some day Old Thee may be my patient."

"And I didn't say it," laughed the violinist, "because he might come to my concert!"

VIII

At five o'clock that afternoon there was a meeting of the co-ordinating committee of the Self-Help Exchange. They had put three kitchen tables together, to make room for a dozen persons, and every day, after the work was over, they met for council as to the next day's work. The meeting was public; it was the affairs of the community they were settling, and they sat in the open, and members who were interested gathered to listen, and if any outsiders wanted to know what was going on, they were welcome.

At the head of the table sat Charlie Day. The big fellow had got himself a well-worn leather jacket and a pair of corduroy trousers; with a shirt open at the neck, he looked like one to tackle any job, and it soon became clear that he had tackled a dozen or two that day. His strong face was leaner than ever, and he looked tired; but this did not keep him from being the driving force of the enterprise. As chairman, he held every man right to the subject; he put the questions quickly, and the proceedings went through as if they had been rehearsed.

There were eight men and four women seated at the tables. Most of them wore working clothes of one sort or another. They were all tired, all serious, and all intensely concentrated on the business before them. The secretary was Susie Adams, daughter of the old carpenter, and she had her record slips, and read off one item after another.

Bill Mase, the gentle and devoted old co-operator, one of the contact men, had been put on the job of finding paint. "All right, Bill, what have you?"

Bill had the paint; at least, he had a paint man who was willing to let them have seventeen gallons of red and white paint "on points." What the paint man wanted was to have the garage at his home changed from single to double. That would take lumber; and the collective brains of the twelve at the table were applied to the stores of lumber in San Sebastian.

"You remember," said Sig Soren, contact co-ordinator, "I have a fellow who offers us a couple of loads of used lumber, but he's got to have his car fixed, and it needs a Buick rear axle, and he won't give up till the work is done."

"Well, we can't wait on that," said Charlie. "We're going to get cabbages for that painting job, and people are asking for them."

"If we had a little cash to offer the man with the lumber——"

"Some day we'll have cash in the bank, and then we won't have these delays."

"I heard old Mr. Fleming say that all the banks are closing," put in Pete Shaver, of the wood section.

"When people can't get their business done any other way, they'll do it our way," said Charlie. "But now, that Buick rear axle——"

"I've got track of one to-day," said Jed Parsons, co-ordinator of the garage section. "The man is willing to take firewood."

"Now you're talking!" cried Sig. "If I could actually show my man a good axle, and a mechanic ready to start work, I think he'd let us have the lumber."

"When do you expect to finish with the Fleming orchard, Pete?"

"Day after to-morrow, sure. He's made it easier for us, by asking for longer logs."

"I talked with Franz just now," said Sig. "We're going to get a hundred dollars more work with Old Thee. We can take part of it in wood, or in credit at Quinn's."

"Credit at Quinn's?" exclaimed the garage section. "Then maybe we can get the tow chain we need!"

"And I can get some more nails!" put in the building section. They could all think of things they wanted out of Quinn's Hardware Emporium!

So it went, through each piece of business, big or little. Each of the contact men reported in turn; they had been scouting for this or that which a couple of hundred families needed, and maybe they had found it, or maybe they had found something else that might be got by some form of service. Each offer suggested some new need; and the question was, who would see to it? Whatever a man undertook to do, it was his business to report next day; and no man liked to come in and face the steel-grey eyes of Charlie Day, and the variously coloured eyes of the other co-ordinators, and admit that he hadn't done anything about the duty he had undertaken.

"All right," Charlie would say. "Bill Mase takes the commitment, to report to-morrow. Next business?" And presently he would say: "It is moved that we undertake to transport two loads of dry manure in exchange for half a load to be taken to our Simmons tract. Is there any objection? Carried." Usually they didn't have to take a vote on propositions; they discussed them until everybody had had his say, and the sentiment had become unanimous. It was a collective mind coming into being and learning to function.

IX

Early in the course of this session of the co-ordinating committee, Walter Leslie had come in with his friend, and they had sat listening attentively. At last the chairman said: "Is there any other business?" The violinist got up.

"I want to introduce Dr. John Cass, a physician of this city," said he. "Some of you may recall, he came with the ambulance and attended Mrs. Jett. He has become interested in the co-op, and I asked him to meet you."

"You are very welcome, Dr. Cass," said Charlie. "I am sure I speak for all here."

"I suggested that he trade with us," continued Leslie. "He has something we need very much; but I can't find anything we can do for him, until Jerry Mason gets his vegetables bigger."

"I'm workin' on 'em day and night, doc," said old Jerry, the "unemployable." "I think we'll have radishes and young onions next week, if the sunshine stays."

"A doctor would have to eat a lot of radishes and onions to match his services," remarked Charlie. "But he can be sure we are going on working, and it won't be long before we can repay with many kinds of goods."

"Here's something we talked about," continued Leslie. "Why couldn't Dr. Cass give us a course of lectures on health? We could give him credits, and admit our members free, and sell tickets to others, just as we're doing for the concert."

There was a chorus of approval. "Step right up, doc, and sign on the dotted line!" exclaimed Pete Shaver, who felt that he was an old friend, because he had met the "doc" that morning in the orchard.

"I wouldn't want to be paid for the lectures," stated Cass. "I don't think I'm good enough at it. But I'll be glad to give them, as my contribution; and if you find you are satisfied, I'll trade with you for medical services."

"I move we get up a series of health lectures by Dr. Cass," said Sig Soren, and it was carried.

"I move that the headquarters section be authorized to make an engagement with Dr. Cass to give medical services on points," said Bill Mase, and that was carried.

"I move that Dr. Cass be admitted to membership," put in Mrs. Jane Pitter, co-ordinator of the clothing section. Hurrah!

"That makes nine new members to-day," remarked Thomas Cullen, head of the personnel department. "They can't keep us down!"

CHAPTER VII

THE ENEMY'S COUNTRY

I

ANTONIO SPADONI had come from Napoli at the age of twenty-seven, and he had been in this great country nearly twenty years; but you would have had to look closely to realize it, because he used his black hair dye every night before he went to sleep, and he had few lines of care, in spite of the depression. He had kept not only the gaiety of youth, but as perfect rows of pearly white teeth as were ever shown in advertisements of a dentifrice. These blessings Tony attributed to one glass of red wine at each meal, and one piece of garlic eaten at night, after his work was done.

Besides these items of diet, Tony lived on music, love, and ideals. In the old days of plenty, he had gone to the opera every night of the two weeks' season, unless it was Wagner. Also he had had records, and could sing every well-known aria in Italian or French—cantabile, pianissimo, appassionnata, con espressione, and especially con amore. Now the pawnbroker had the phonograph records, but nothing but death could take them out of Tony's mind.

He was little, sprightly, and talkative not merely with his tongue, but with his eyebrows, his hands, his shoulders, and his soul. He was an artist, and expressed himself in everything he did, his work as well as his play. When he trimmed a man's hair, it was really an effort to make the man beautiful. When he used scented talcum and bay rum, it was for the pleasure of making the man smell sweet, if only for a short time. When he offered a shampoo, it was not to get an extra quarter for the boss, but because the procedure was honorific, and gave Tony an opportunity to manipulate soapsuds with graceful gestures.

Tony had come early to the meeting, because he knew the speaker, and knew that he was going to say what Tony liked to hear. He sat in the front row, where he could look up at the speaker, which was important because he spoke as Tony spoke, not merely with his tongue and vocal chords, but with his eyebrows, his hands, his shoulders, and his soul. The speaker also was Italian, taller than Tony, and younger, so that he did not have to dye his beautiful wavy black hair, which Tony had been proud to cut for him. The speaker used all the beautiful words which Tony loved, and which, alas, he did not hear so often nowadays in his native language: *libertà*, *egualità*, *umanità*, *fratellanza*, *idealismo*.

The young orator was in the midst of one of his most fiery periods, denouncing the crimes against human brotherhood which were being committed in his native land—when suddenly a terrible thing happened. From several places close up front men leaped to their feet and rushed the stage. The speaker was taken completely by surprise, and the men drew pieces of gas pipe from under their coats and fell upon him with roars of rage. He bent his head, and raised his arms to protect it, but they beat him down. One of them turned to the audience, shouting: "Morte ai traditori!"

A hundred men sprang to their feet with answering cries, and one of the first was Antonio Spadoni. He sprang upon the stage; and the moment his feet touched it, one of the assailants swung down upon his head, and that was the last the little barber knew for some time.

When he opened his eyes again he was lying flat on his back, and his head seemed to be on fire, and when he was able to touch it, he discovered that he had on what appeared to be a Hindu turban. A man in white uniform was attending him,

and brought him milk, but would not talk to him; and after a couple of days, when Tony was better, he found out why—they carried him and laid him on a cot in a jail cell.

Still they would not talk to him; but when he was able to walk they escorted him into court, and Tony found himself with several others of his race, lined up before the bar and charged with "assault and battery." He knew a couple of the men, and noted that they were of his own way of thinking; for some reason the police had been unable to find a single one of those who had assaulted the speaker. Tony knew the answer, for it was what the speaker had been explaining in his oration; the dread hand of Fascismo, working with fine Italian subtlety in the political life of America, reaching everywhere, from the highest places in the State Department to the lowest on the police force of the city of San Sebastian.

Apparently everything had been arranged in advance, and the prisoners at the bar were to be sent away after a perfunctory hearing. But the anti-Fascists, too, had an organization, and there had been protest, and a lawyer had been engaged, and leaflets distributed calling a meeting. So presently, after telling his story, the defendant Antonio Spadoni, who had never been arrested before, and had a job as a barber, heard himself sentenced to three months in the city jail, and then heard the sentence "suspended." The only meaning the little man knew for that word was hanging; he was bewildered, but relieved, when they told him that he was free to go, and would be all right so long as he behaved himself, and kept away from "radical" meetings.

II

So there was Tony, rather weak, and still with some plaster over the top of his partly shaven head, entering the "tonorial parlours" of Sebastiano Gerardo, on the ground floor of the Trader's Hotel. He had been made into something of a hero after the trial, and had liked it; all the greater was his dismay when his boss received him with dark frowns, and the whisper of such words as "gaglioffo" and "assassino"—which are every bit as bad as they sound to foreign ears. Of course, it was the subtle hand of Fascismo again; all the bosses were for it, or if they were not, they had to please their customers. Tony was ordered to pack up his things, and he would be paid

the two dollars and forty-two cents which he had earned before he got arrested, and then he would take himself off the place as quickly as possible.

Tony had three ornamental shaving mugs, which he had had inscribed with the names of Rienzi, Mazzini, and Garibaldi. He had three shaving brushes, and a couple of good razors, two pairs of scissors, and a brush and comb. In a closet in a rear room he had three laundered white coats, and he went back to get these, and there, in privacy, came tears welling into his eyes. They were not merely of rage, but of terror; for Tony had had this job for only a couple of months, and before that he had been hunting work for more than a year, and had come close to starvation. Two mad impulses tore at him now: the first, to take the razor and sever his own throat, right there in that room, and thus punish the wicked tyrant with a terrible scandal and a sense of guilt which would haunt him all his life; the second, to use the razor upon the boss, and send him to the throne of eternity where tyrants are adequately punished.

Tony, being an artist, expressed himself in words, not in actions. He made up his mind that as soon as he had got his hands on the two dollars and forty-two cents which stood between him and starvation, he would tell the maledetto padrone exactly what he thought of him and also of his duce. With that stern resolve he wiped away his tears, and rolled up his belongings, and went back into the tonsorial parlours.

Sebastiano Gerardo had the chair nearest to the door, where he could also attend the cash register. When Tony appeared, he was talking to a man, and as Tony had to wait for his money, he listened to the conversation.

The man was trying to "sell" the boss some proposition, and the boss wasn't very keen about it. "But sure, I got spare time," said he. "But in spare time I rest. What for should I work if I don't get nothing?"

"It is a long way from nothing, as I have tried to explain. We have three hundred members, who need haircuts every now and then. They are all working, and producing things, and getting more means to produce every day. If you have repairs in your shop——"

"I don't have no such things. The hotel see to that."

"Perhaps you have a home——"

"Sure, I got little place, but I like to fix him myself."

"Well, we have big vegetable gardens. Now we have apricots, pretty soon we'll have other fruits, and we'll dry them and can them. We shall have all kinds of food, and if you trade with us, it will be the same as money. The main point is, our people will only come to you at hours when you are not busy."

"That's all right, mister, if you got customers for me I pay you commish, or I give them fellers a cheap rate. But I like to get cash money for my work, and then if I want to buy vegetables, that is something else."

"Unfortunately," said the man, "cash money is scarce these days. If you're getting all you need, you're lucky."

Tony listened, and at the same time studied the stranger. He was tall and thin, with grey hair and moustache and a kindly face; he looked like a student, an idealist like Tony himself. He did not show any annoyance at the padrone's lack of enthusiasm, but patiently explained that this was a new way of getting a living; this was a co-operative, a group of people trying to help one another. "Not mine for me," said the man, "but ours for us."

But Sebastiano had no time for such things, he said; he was busy enough with his own affairs. And Tony's rage against the boss took a new turn. He perceived a new way to punish him, and broke suddenly into the conversation. "Mister, you waste your time talking to a feller like that. He don't understand such ideas. He is slave-driver. He grind the poor man's face."

Sebastiano became as angry as if the discharged employee were taking from him the greatest treasure in the world. "Cane!" he exclaimed—not English, but Italian—not a walking-stick, but "cahnay"—an insult. "Don't listen to that feller! He is jailbird."

"Jailbird?" cried Tony. "I am—what you say, martire. I go to jail because I defend great orator for liberty, for democrazia, for governo popolare. He call me jailbird—him that is goffo of Il Duce, of Fascismo, that betray the Italian people——"

The stranger didn't understand any Italian, and especially not when two infuriated men were both talking it at once. In good American fashion he called Mussolini "the deuce," and added that he rated just that. "Eel doo-chay" was something he had never heard before, nor did he recognize the thing

called "Fosheesmo." But he had read about the anti-Fascist riot, and gradually it became clear to him that this little man with the plastered head was one of the victims, and that he had been "fired" on that account.

"You want barber, mister?" cried Tony. "I am good barber. I cut hair for all your three hundred men, I shave them good. I like apricot, I like good vegetable; you give me some, give me place to stay, I work for you, and not for damn slave-driver, by gosh!"

Tony turned upon the alleged slave-driver. "You give me two dollar forty-two," said he; and when he got it in his tight fist, he raised the fist to the sky, or rather, to the ceiling, and yelled: "Abbasso eel doo-chay!" and then: "Viva libertà!" He seized the elderly and dignified American gentleman by the arm and marched him from the shop. "Come on, mister, we getta hell out!"

III

All this was in the month of June, and the co-op had been going nearly eight months, and the big warehouse had become a scene of many activities. Right by the front door was a bulletin board, having on it a list of some two score different performers of services who were now doing business with the institution on what were called "open trade agreements": auto repairing, cabinetwork, chiropractor, dancing, laundry, nurse, optician, osteopath, photography, stationery, tailor, violin, voice teaching, watch repair. And now there would be added near the top a line reading "BARBER: ANTONIO SPADONI." The composer and proprietor of that line would be so proud of it, he would never pass without stopping to read it. It was the first time in twenty-five years of "wage slavery" that he had ever had his name displayed.

On the other side, opposite the bulletin board, was the commissary, a regular little store, with a counter, but no cash register—it was a store without cash. Instead, you presented a little white card, which was your credit for ten hours labour, one thousand "points." The card had rows of numbers on it, fives and tens and twenty-fives and hundreds; when you made a purchase, some of these numbers were punched off. At one side the goods were on exhibit, but safely protected by chicken wire from too-hungry co-oppers. There were now all the early fresh vegetables, and likewise many lug-boxes full of apricots.

The co-op was experiencing the much-talked-of "economy of abundance"—in the line of apricots.

It had experienced this new economy several times in its brief history. First walnuts, then lemons and navel oranges—especially those which happened to be of crooked shape or otherwise unworthy to go out to the world under the label of "sunkist." Pretty soon it would be Valencia oranges, then peaches and plums, apples and pears. The reason for this was that the producers of these crops faced a glutted market, and the price they got would not pay the cost of picking, to say nothing of the freight and commission charges. So, if some day it should happen that a decent-looking fellow would come driving into the ranch, and present the card of the San Sebastian Self-Help Exchange, and offer to gather the crop on shares, or to take it all for useful services, such as mending a barn, pruning trees, digging ditches, burning brush, the ranchman would be quite willing to talk it over, and read letters from others stating that they had traded with this "co-op," and that it could be relied upon to do whatever it undertook.

The establishment looked quite marvellous to the forlorn and frightened little barber. At one side, along the wall, were half a dozen oil stoves with kettles on them, and a table with many glass jars, and half a dozen ladies engaged in preserving apricots. To be sure, they all appeared to be middle-aged or grey-haired; but Tony trusted that there must be some younger ones in the background—and anyhow, all ladies were good to practise on. Against the opposite wall was an oven, and here some more nice motherly ladies were baking bread, and filling the place with an odour almost unendurable to the nostrils of a man convalescing from an illness. In one corner an old fellow was cobbling shoes, and in another a group of ladies were sewing on dresses. Through the back door you could see a truck with a man unloading apricots and vegetables. Surely a most intriguing place!

They took Tony into a little room called the personnel office, where a serious little man in spectacles, Mr. Cullen, asked him questions about himself and his life, and wrote it all down on a blank. He explained about the institution, and how you were paid at the rate of a hundred points an hour. Tony said it would be all right with him, if he could get enough for a loaf of that fresh bread and some of those young onions.

He was passed on to another official, who discussed with him the cost of shaves and haircuts; Tony said he could give about four an hour, so it was agreed that on individual jobs he would charge twenty-five points each. He wanted to go to work right away, and show everybody what he could do; he had all his things in a bundle, and all he needed was a chair and a customer. He was told that most of the men were out at work now, but if he could find anyone who wanted barbering, that was up to him.

IV

Tony went out into the big room, and fell into conversation with Ole Svenson, the truck driver, who had just unloaded the last of the apricots, and was waiting for the headquarters people to find out if he could go and get a load of lumber. Ole was young and good-looking, with yellow hair and a lot of it; and Tony asked him if he didn't want some of it off; Ole said he wouldn't have time, but Tony said he was a quick worker and would show him.

He found a chair and set it up on two empty "lugs," and borrowed a sheet from a lady who was repairing sheets. He set up the chair, a decent distance away from the bread dough and the canning jars; he put on his white coat—nothing could be done without his white coat, of course. He put Ole in the chair, and tucked the sheet around his neck, and set to work, and in a jiffy had one-half of Ole's head looking neat and fashionable. But at that moment came the girl from upstairs, with the ticket for the lumber job; and the conscientious Ole had to go, half-and-half. "I finish the job nexta trip," said Tony.

Somewhere in the city a whistle blew, and then more whistles—it was the noon hour; and old Mr. Timothy Fetters, the cobbler, laid down his hammer and came over to the "dago." Said he: "My old woman's been beggin' me for a month to let her cut my hair; but now I'll have it done regular—the first time since the depression. It'll make me feel like a new man."

So very quickly the grey hairs of the old shoemaker from Massachusetts were added to the yellow hairs of the Swede from Minnesota on the floor; and strange as it might seem, the yellow hairs from half of Ole's head were more than the

grey hairs from a whole head. But never mind, old Tim looked into the cracked mirror, which one of the ladies had hung from a pillar of the warehouse, and he saw it was "regular," and it set him up somethin' wonderful, he said.

Folks who were quitting for lunch stopped to be introduced, and to say how glad they were to have a barber added to the establishment. Tony bowed, and showed his lovely rows of white teeth, and told everybody how ably he meant to serve them. Seeing that it was rest time, and being so very happy that it required expression, he volunteered: "I sing too."

"Oh, what do you sing?" inquired one of the young ladies—there were young ones upstairs in the headquarters section, it appeared.

"I sing lovely songs, all grand opera," declared the little barber. "Italian, French, I know them all."

"Oh, sing us a grand opera!" exclaimed Susie Adams.

"Just a little aria, lady," corrected Tony; without further preliminaries he drew back a step, squared his chest, and took a deep breath. He had forgotten that his head was shaved and plastered, and that he might look a trifle queer. The divine afflatus seized him, and he proclaimed:

"La donna e mobile
Quale il vento."

It was quite a voice from such a little man; it filled the warehouse, and brought the soul of the great "Carus" back to life. Everybody was pleased to have more talent added to their group! They told Tony about how much they already had: Cristy Jett, who played the banjo and sang folk-songs; his brother, who was a country fiddler; Walter Leslie, a real violinist, who had played in two concerts for them; and a pianist, Mrs. Davis, who could play accompaniments for anyone.

Also they had an art department, shut off in one corner upstairs, and three painters who were painting landscapes and portraits of farmers, which the co-op was trading for butter and eggs, and a much-needed harrow, and even a load of oat straw. Tony became so eager to see these paintings that he forgot all about lunch. But he did not forget to borrow a broom and sweep up the yellow and grey hairs from the floor; for he wanted all these nice people to know that he was a

proper barber, and would help them keep everything as it should be.

When the men came in from work that evening, word spread that they had got a barber "on points"; and it was surprising how many who had been too busy to have their hair cut by their wives now found that they had time to have it done "regular." When the men heard that Tony had no money to pay room rent, they told him about a stable which they had fixed up, belonging to an old pioneer, Dad Slemper; about a dozen of them slept there, and Tony could get himself some straw, and a blanket out of the commissary—they would lend him the credit if he didn't have enough yet.

So the little "dago" was fixed up, and excited as a child going to a picnic. The co-op hoped some day to have a restaurant, but as yet everyone had to get his own meals; and presently the men at Dad Slemper's made the discovery that besides being a barber and grand opera singer, Tony was a "cuoco." All he wanted was a package of spaghetti, a can of tomatoes, an onion, and a little hamburger, and he could fix you a meal that you would talk about, during and afterwards. Since no one in Dad's stable had any use for "the deuce," they made a happy family.



This Italian idyll lasted about a fortnight. Then it happened one day that Sebastiano Gerardo met on the street an old customer of his, and remarked, "You don't come to me no more"; to which the customer replied: "I belong to the co-op, and we got our own barber now." "You got own barber? What's his name?" When Sebastiano heard the name, he made a wry face, and said, "That feller no good. You look out for him."

The proprietor of the Trader's Hotel barber-shop went off and thought it over, and the more he thought the madder he got. He had one of his friends go to the co-op and look it over; then he paid his good money to call the office of the state barber inspector on the long-distance telephone. "What's this?" he demanded. "Have we got barber law in this state or ain't we? And if we got it, what for you don't enforce it? I have to pay good money to keep clean place and what you call sanitary, but them fellers at what they call the co-op they

break all the laws and they take all my customers and I may go broke."

So, a few days later, a stranger strolled into the Self-Help Exchange, and stood for a while watching Tony Spadoni while he trimmed the tresses of one of the headquarters young ladies, humming the best parts of Giuseppe Verdi at the same time. When the operation was over, the stranger introduced himself, and wanted to know if the operator had a licence. Tony said he had, and got it out of his pocket. "Don't you know it ought to be pasted on the wall?" demanded the man. "And where's your barber sign outside? And where's your partition? And your hot and cold running water?" Poor Tony, panic-stricken, took the man upstairs to see "Mr. Charlie" and the others, and find out what it was all about.

The office of the chairman of the co-ordinating committee—that was Charlie Day's title—had been shut off from the rest of the loft with some building paper applied to "two-by-threes." The ceiling was supposed to be papered also, but unfortunately the paper had given out when the job was half completed, and it had been necessary to use the comic section from the Sunday newspaper. So there on the ceiling were the Boop-a-doops and the Flubby-dubbs and Peter and his Pun-kin-eater, and all you had to do was to get a spyglass or a ladder for your entertainment.

Charlie had a big oak desk which had at some time been rescued from a fire, and he had a case of shelves which one of the carpenters had made for him out of a packing-box. He had three chairs, two of them with backs and one with three legs—but all right if you kept it against the wall. The co-op was concentrating upon getting two things first—tools of production, and food.

There in that unimpressive office Charlie and Thomas Cullen and others of the headquarters staff laboured to persuade the deputy barber inspector that a chair set up on two lug-boxes and some shaving and haircutting implements resting on a soapbox did not constitute a commercial barbering establishment within the meaning of the California barbers' code. "You see, Mr. Inspector, Tony is a member of our co-op; and so it is really that we are cutting our own hair, isn't it?"

"Yes, but doesn't he get paid?"

"No, he exchanges his services for those of other members

of the co-op. A man grows onions for him, and a woman bakes bread for him, and so on."

"Just what does he get for his haircuts?"

"He gets a card." They showed it. "This entitles him to take from the commissary whatever it has in stock. It is not purchase, but barter."

"But the law says 'hire or reward,'" said the inspector. And that was indeed a knockout. One could hardly deny that bread and onions were a "reward."

"And moreover," continued the official, "where's the barber sign which the law requires shall be on the outside of the building? And the 'partition of ceiling height' which must surround the barber chair if it's in any place of business. And the hot and cold running water, which must be available 'on the premises'?"

In short, it was hopeless. They had cold water, but no boiler for hot water and no money to buy or install one. As matters stood, Tony, having violated so many laws, was liable to lose his licence. "By rights I ought to swear out a complaint against you right now," said the inspector. "But we don't want to be hard on poor people, and if you'll promise to quit barbering, I'll go no further."

Of course, they promised; and poor Tony stood with tears in his eyes, and was not to be comforted, even when Charlie Day, the big boss, patted him on the back and told him to cheer up, he was still a member of the co-op, and they would teach him how to grow his own onions and garlic.

VI

There happened to be a general assembly that evening; a gathering of all the members of the co-op, to discuss its many affairs, hear reports, and pass judgment on the doings of its officials. The news of the closing of their barbering establishment created such excitement that it was hard to get the people to talk about anything else. Tony had been scouting among the Italians—they were like a little village all to themselves, and everybody knew everything that was going on. He reported that it was the action of a jealous "padrone," angry because he had lost a customer; also it was part of the Fascist conspiracy, to punish and outlaw every Italian who refused to bow his neck to the secret yoke of "eel doo-chay."

Of course that made the co-operators mad; and what made them still madder was that they would have to go back to having their hair cut by their wives. Some hotheads proposed that they make a test case of it. Said the shrill and excitable Mrs. Jane Pitter: "Let's notify them that we're going to cut our own hair, and see if they dare arrest us."

Sig Soren, the pacifist, got up. "My friends, I beg you not to have it said that we even discussed such an action here. I beg you to realize that we can't afford to make enemies of the public authorities. They can persecute us in a hundred ways, and we have plenty of trouble without hunting any more."

"But what can we do?" cried a voice. "Are we going to leave our hair uncut?"

Up rose Brother Lawrence, in his Biblical regalia of white robe and sandals. "Why not?" he inquired.

There was a roar of laughter. Brother Lawrence, friend of the vegetables, with his soft curling brown beard and his wavy locks draped over the back of his neck, asking "Why not?"

Brother Lawrence was in earnest; but he was used to being laughed at. When the sounds had died, he said: "I beg you to consider my suggestion, brothers. You all agree to let your hair grow, and not to shave; and presently people will be asking you: 'What is the matter?' You answer: 'The police will not let us cut one another's hair; and we have no money to pay a barber, so what can we do? We are poor people, and have no work.'"

They began to look at one another. By golly, that was it! Applause broke out here and there, and more laughter, but this time of approval and delight. "We'll do it!" cried voices. They didn't have to take any vote; the sentiment was too obvious. Every man would take a vow like Samson!

So it was done. In a week or so all the men of the co-op began to have chins like brown or black or grey velvet; or perhaps like currycombs. And of course they all talked about it, everywhere they went. They went to a great many places; and their wives went to more places, and all the members of their families. The children in school would say, "My daddy's gettin' a beard, because the police won't let us cut our own hair." A thousand people, all over town, saying each a dozen times a day, "The authorities forbid us co-oppers to cut one

another's hair, so what can we do? " It made quite a mass of propaganda.

Presently it reached the ears of Barney Bascom, star reporter for the San Sebastian *Morning Enterprise*. Barney was one of the boys who had splurged so heavily on the story of the Jett family and the baby born in the co-op. That had been one of the red-letter days in a star reporter's life, so Barney had marked the co-op in his mind, as a fisherman marks the place where once he got a big "strike." Barney would call up, and ask for Sig, who knew a good story when he met it. Charlie Day wasn't so genial—Charlie insisted that too much publicity was bad for the co-op, it compelled headquarters to waste time answering the questions of social researchers, and of amiable old ladies who thought it was just lovely, and of correspondents who wanted to write it up in the Bangor, Maine, *Commercial*—and what good did that do a lot of struggling people in San Sebastian, California?

Anyhow, Barney Bascom came round, and they showed him the barber chair, which they had left as a form of social protest, a reminder to any man who might be wavering in his resolve. Tony was out in the field, learning to grow his own onions and garlic; there was a story in that too, because Tony had eaten a million of them, more or less, but had never had any idea where or how they grew, and had been delighted to learn that you could just stick seed in the ground anywhere. The upshot was that Barney made a date, and brought a photographer to the place, and Tony put on his white coat and was photographed by his empty chair, with a dozen of the velvet-chinned men of the co-op lined up in the background.

You can imagine what a funny story a skilled journalist could make of that. It was all over town in no time, and men were laughing—and incidentally, of course, talking about the Self-Help Exchange, and what was it, and why couldn't the poor devils be allowed to cut their own hair, and what difference did it make? It was the general sentiment that the authorities could find some more serious form of law-breaking if they tried real hard.

Results followed quickly. That evening a man strolled into the co-op, saying that he was from police headquarters, and wanted to see "the boss." They took him upstairs to the office, and there was Charlie, busy with accounts and problems, as always. The stranger looked quizzically at the half-

scorched desk and the comic supplement ceiling, and then said, "I'm Casey, detective sergeant from headquarters."

"Pleased to meet you, sergeant," said Charlie, getting up and shaking hands. "What can I do for you?"

"I want to know about this business of the police not letting you fellows cut your own hair."

"We never said the police, I'm sure."

"But the papers said that."

"Well, you know the papers don't always get things straight. What happened was that the state deputy inspector warned us that if we didn't stop cutting one another's hair, he'd get the police and have us arrested."

"That feller must have been hard up for somethin' to do with himself."

"That's what we thought; but of course we had to do as we were told."

"Well, the chief sent me down to get it straightened out. Is it that you fellers just cut the hair of your own members, and not for anybody else?"

"If anybody that wasn't a member ever had his hair cut, it was an accident, I assure you."

"Then if that's so, you fellers just go ahead and forget it, and there won't be any more trouble."

"Oh, that's fine! Thanks ever so much!"

"But don't have anything more in the papers now, you understand. Nothin' one way or the other, see?"

"Sure, we'll do all we can. Barney Bascom has been pretty decent to us."

"All right. You guys are behavin' yourselves, so far as we have ever heard, and we can't see you're doin' any harm."

"Thanks, sergeant. We've done our best to deserve that, and we don't want to make any trouble at any time. If ever there should be a complaint, I'd appreciate it if you'd come to me, and I'll promise you it'll be attended to."

So that was that; and great was the rejoicing when the word spread in the co-op. Philosophilus, the little astrologer who dressed like a pirate, and had studied all the lore of the East, said it was a perfect example of "ahimsa," the nonviolent resistance advocated by Gandhi. The rush to the barber chair was so great that Tony was kept busy for several days and nights. The joke was, he had become so much interested in his baby onions and garlic, he didn't want to come in from the

fields! After the first rush was over, he laid down the rule that he was a barber only on Sundays and holidays, and in the evenings.

VII

The story of Tony Spadoni was classified among the comedies. But not long afterwards came one which threatened to be more serious. Mabel Saugus invited Sig Soren to have lunch with her, and told about a hint she had got from her brother. Len Saugus couldn't give up the habit of gibing at his sister; and his last gibe had been that the "Reds" would soon have to devise some new method of getting her money, because their Self-Help Exchange was going to be put out of business.

When Mabel asked him what he meant by that, the answer was that Len knew what was going on, he made it his business to know; he was in touch with the men who really counted in this city—and so on, the bragging of a poor fellow who had been ploughing with a team of horses only three or four years ago, and whose sudden good fortune had inflated his ego. This much the sister was able to get from his discourse: at a recent meeting of the executive committee of the Chamber of Commerce of San Sebastian, one of the businessmen upon whose domain the co-op had been trespassing had registered his complaint, and it had been decided to investigate the enterprise, with a view to taking action before its menace became any greater.

Sig was much alarmed, and went to see Old Thee about it. Sig had the entrée to the great man's office now—of course, on the terms that he did not come very often. Sig's psychology had worked; Mr. Fleming, having once backed the co-op and been vindicated in his judgment, now identified it with his judgment, and was pleased with it as with himself. He would tell all the town that those co-oppers were a fine lot. This salved his conscience, and established him as a liberal and open-minded man; after he had helped a couple of hundred "down-and-outers" to get some firewood in his home city, he would feel justified in beating down the wages of thousands of agricultural labourers in a great valley which he controlled.

Sig told Thee his story, and the old man rang for his secretary and told him to call up the Chamber of Commerce and find out what it was all about. Presently the secretary

came in and reported that at the last meeting of the executive committee, Mr. Harry Simkin, of the Simkin Company, coal and wood dealers, had denounced the Self-Help Exchange because it was ruining his business, and had proposed that it should be boycotted and "wound up" before it got out of hand. The matter had been taken under advisement.

So there it was; and poor Sig, who looked so big and dangerous, and really was soft-hearted as a girl, was in a state of distress. "We just can't afford to have enemies like that, Mr. Fleming!"

"What do you want to do about it?" demanded the president of Golden State.

"I think I should go and see this Mr. Simkin."

"He's a hard guy."

"Well, you know, Mr. Fleming, you wasn't so very soft, the first time I come here."

Old Thee smiled to himself, remembering the gun he had in his desk drawer, and which he had put into his coat pocket before admitting this notorious "Red" and ex-jailbird.

"Would you like me to introduce you to Simkin?" he asked.

"Thank you, Mr. Fleming, but I think it might be wiser to approach him in the line of business."

"What would you say to him?"

"Ask him to trade with us."

Old Thee looked into the other's face, to be sure whether or not he was joking. Seeing the entirely guileless look of the big fellow, he emitted a chuckle. "You'll have your hands full with that bird."

"We have a real proposition to put to businessmen, Mr. Fleming, and I have faith in its power."

Thee chuckled again. "I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll sweeten the pot." This from an old poker player. "You get any business with Harry Simkin, and I'll donate a hundred dollars' worth of groceries to your people."

"Gosh!" said Sig Soren. "If I can't get him any other way, I'll offer to split with him." That brought another chuckle from the old man; he had learned that Sig wasn't so naïve as nature had made him to look—and Old Thee liked him all the better for that.

VIII

The Simkin Company, coal and wood dealers, had half a dozen yards in various parts of the city, and an office at one of them. Mr. Harry Simkin was easy to see, because he traded in real estate, and anything else that came along; but he wasn't so easy to stay with—he wanted to know right away what your business was, and if he wasn't interested he said so in one sentence, and expected you to get out before he had to say it again. He was solidly built, with a round face, very red, a solid jaw, a cold, observant eye—in short, a man who had learned to take care of his own in a world that was full of other men exactly like himself.

Before his desk he saw a powerfully built fellow in a not too well-kept suit and a blue flannel shirt, open at the throat; apparently some sort of workingman of the more intelligent type. "Well, what can I do for you?" he demanded.

"Mr. Simkin, my name is Soren, and I represent the Self-Help Exchange, a co-operative which the unemployed of this town have started. You've heard of it, perhaps."

"Yes, I've heard of it."

"I am head of the contact section, and I have come to ask you to consider trading with us."

"Me trade with you? For what?"

"We may think of a hundred different things, Mr. Simkin."

"I understand you're trading wood. Do you want to trade it to me?"

"No, I imagine you have all you need in these times. But it might be that you would help us to trade wood with others."

"Are you joking?"

"I am very much in earnest, Mr. Simkin. We have some three hundred families who are trying to keep alive in this depression. If you would help us to do it, it would be money in your own pocket."

"How do you figure that?"

"If we can't do it, there will have to be a dole from the city, or the county, or the state; and you are a taxpayer. Surely I don't have to explain that to a businessman."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Give us work—any kind that you need. For one thing, we might take care of your dead customers."

"How do you mean—dead customers?"

"I mean financially dead. You must know scores of people in this town that used to buy wood from you, and that you've had to cut off because they can't pay their bills. Such customers would be useful to us, and us to them." Sig's mistakes in his grammar did not trouble Mr. Simkin, who made them also.

"How could you sell them wood if they have no money?"

"You must understand, Mr. Simkin, we don't sell wood, we trade for it."

"And on what basis?"

"You have to get clear the nature of this depression—it's not one of scarcity, but of superfluity. People have goods or services and can't sell them because other people have no money. We have no money either, but we work without it, trading our labour for the other fellow's surplus."

"This is a new one on me," said hard-boiled businessman proud of it. He looked at this big workingman, who looked as if he could break an ordinary man in two, and yet had a kind, simple sort of face, like a cherub. "You propose that I give you a list of my bad risks? What would I get out of it?"

"In the first place, advertising. Three hundred families are trading with you on a friendly basis; you've helped them in a time of need. By and by, if business picks up, those families have jobs again, and money to buy wood; they all remember Simkin's—oh, yes, they traded with us, we'll buy from them. On the other hand, if business doesn't pick up, you've helped three hundred families to get a way of self-support instead of being on public charity—which you as a taxpayer have to pay for. I'm sure you don't expect the thousands of unemployed in this town to starve to death."

"No, I suppose they got to be fed."

"Then you, the taxpayer, have to put up the money. You're too shrewd a man to need me to prove that. No matter how it's disguised, a bond issue or currency inflation or what—no matter whether it's city or county or state or Federal—it comes out of the property owners sooner or later. If you help us to become self-supporting, it's not only a form of social insurance, but actual money in your pocket."

"It's money out of my pocket when you trade wood to my customers, isn't it?"

"But how often does that happen? I pledge you my word, seventy-five per cent of the people who trade with us are not customers, because they are broke, as we are."

"I know of two cases where I lost customers to you."

"Maybe so, Mr. Simkin—but how big was the deal? Stop and figure it out. Here was a rancher with a field of cabbages, and he couldn't market them, so they was to lay and rot. He agreed to trade with us, and we got the cabbages for painting his barn. Then we went to a paint store in town, and as part of the price of the paint the man took some cordwood. Maybe he was your customer, and you heard about it. Well, it was twenty dollars' worth of wood. I don't know what your percentage of profit is, but let's say you lost two dollars. Perhaps you might lose twenty-five dollars in actual profit during a year. I'll bet my old hat that if I had took this much time to tell you what is going on among our people—about families that has been half-fed for three years, about little children too weak to go to school, about old grandmothers that go out and root in garbage cans at night to get a piece of meat for the kids—yes, by God, I could make you sick with such stories, and if I asked you for twenty-five dollars' worth of milk for these children, you'd ring up the dairy and tell them to charge it to you. But you see, I don't ask for charity, I ask for twenty-five dollars of your business profits—because out of those we can get literally hundreds of dollars' worth of goods for our people. Out of that two-dollar business loss I have told you about we made work for half a dozen men painting a barn, and a dozen picking cabbages, and we had cabbages for all our three hundred families for a month, and some more that we traded for flour, and our women baked bread—we literally lived on bread and cabbages last winter, with a few other things the relief people gave us. Nobody in the world ever made a dollar go as far as us."

"That's very interesting," said the hard-boiled Mr. Simkin. "Tell me more about it."

IX

Presently the hard-boiled one was discussing the details of what he might do for the co-op—just assuming that he wanted to! "You can't seriously mean to ask for a list of my bad debts," he argued. "That wouldn't be ethical."

"Don't give us exactly that, Mr. Simkin. It's nothing to us who owes you money. Give us a list of people who might trade with us for wood without hurting you. I'd go to see them and say, just like I say to you, what have you got that we can use? Maybe tools, maybe paint, maybe an old car. For example—so far we've managed to get two small trucks; we work them literally all day and all night—except when they're laid up for repairs, and then we're stuck. We desperately need another truck; and maybe you have one that is past the point where it's economical for you to run it."

"And what would I get for that?"

"Any sort of work that honest and capable men can do. Maybe you have sheds or fences that need repairs."

"My own men do that sort of work. I have to take care of them first."

"Of course. But then, at your home? We can clean up the place, plough the land, any sort of jobs."

"I'm trying to get the theory of this thing. If I give the work to you, I'm taking it from some other fellow, and where's the gain in that?"

"No gain at all, Mr. Simkin—if you have the cash, and would have the work did anyhow. But with most people, it's work they wouldn't have did, because they haven't got the cash. It's only did when they see a chance to do it on points, as we call it—that is to say, they trade something for our labour."

"By heck, that's a real idea!" said Mr. Simkin. "I must say it never occurred to me before."

He continued to ply Sig with questions. He kept him there for an hour, until he knew all about the various details of the co-op, and all its plans, and made quite sure in his own suspicious mind that the big fellow was not hiding any dark secrets from him. Then suddenly he said: "What do you think is going to happen, Mr. Soren? Is the President going to be able to straighten out this mess?"

There he was offering to talk politics! This busy, hard-driving moneymaker, the hardest-boiled of them all! But these men had been through a harrowing experience, just prior to Roosevelt's inauguration; the business structure had come pretty close to tumbling about their ears; the banks had all shut down, and they still hadn't got over their fright. The new President had come like a knight in shining armour, pro-

missing to save them; and would he be able to do it, or wouldn't he? Everybody wanted to know.

"Personally," answered Sig, "I don't see how business can ever re-employ the idle, because we have perfected machines and processes so that one man can do the work of ten, and more and more workers are being froze out."

"But then, what can we do with them?"

Sig explained, there would have to be some method like this Self-Help Exchange, by which surplus men and women could produce for themselves; they would have to own the tools in common, and so own the product. It was a brand-new idea to Mr. Harry Simkin—it seemed to be literally true that he had never given a minute's thought to such questions in his life. He actually asked Sig to come back and talk them over some day; and he said, quite cordially: "I have to take it back—I was prejudiced against you fellows, because I didn't understand. We haven't got any truck we don't need, but I'll work out some sort of a deal to help you. I don't want to see America start the dole, like England, and it does me good to see men that really want to work, and are putting some business sense into it."

X

Sig Soren went back to report to Old Thee, and these two had a funny time. Sig, of course, was in seventh heaven, having won a hundred dollars' worth of groceries—at wholesale prices—for his hungry people. As for the president of the Golden State Light and Power Company, a hundred dollars was no more to him than the price of one of his wife's lace handkerchiefs, and he was entertained by a good story.

The truth was, the old boy was getting older every day, you could see it in his looks, and in his behaviour about a matter like this. For years he had been pounding tables, and coercing men, and holding on to his wealth; now he was like a tired old bulldog, which falls asleep even while it holds its grip. When Thee Fleming was with someone he trusted, he would unbend and gossip like an old woman; he made Sig Soren tell him every detail of his conversation with the hard-boiled Mr. Simkin; and when he heard how Sig had offered to take over the firm's "dead customers," he laughed till his shrivelled cheeks turned red.

Also, he took a childish pleasure in knowing what kind of

groceries the people of the co-op were going to get; he spent some time discussing the relative prices and nutritive properties of rice and beans. He wanted to know at what prices the co-op would sell them, and was pleased to know that it would add enough to cover its own overhead. Yes, things had to be conducted on sound business lines; they ought to put by a reserve too. He called up one of the wholesale grocery concerns and made the deal with them, and forced them to give a fifteen per cent discount from their list prices. He laid down the law to the manager: "I'm helping to support the unemployed of this town, and it wouldn't hurt you to help a little. At least you don't have to make a profit out of me." It was the old Old Thee, whose harsh voice of mastery the town had long known.

And when he got that fifteen per cent, he felt so good that he wanted the full benefit of it. "Would you like to earn another hundred?" he asked Sig; and when the big fellow replied that he would like to earn a thousand, Thee said: "I'll give you one that will really stump you, this time! If you land him, you'll deserve a medal."

The old gentleman was getting a malicious pleasure out of turning Sig loose on the business troglodytes of San Sebastian! Now he was thinking about his friend and crony, who had an office in this same Golden State Building. "George Reverdy Mills is his name, and he's a regular old curmudgeon. Nobody knows how much money he's got, but he could pave himself a highway across the continent; and he don't do one thing with it but just gamble in the market and pile it up. What makes me mad is, he never gets caught; he always knows which way the market is going—and then he's so damn cocky! If you can get ten cents out of him, it's that much to the good."

"I'll get all I can, rest assured."

"He was jeering at me for letting the co-op rope me in; he says the unemployed don't want to work, and ought to starve till they do. So now try your hand on him, and if you can get him to do business with you, I'll buy you two hundred dollars' worth of groceries."

"I'll do my best, Mr. Fleming," said the conscientious contact man.

"I'll give you this tip. Stick to him. Make him put you out of his office."

"Believe me," answered Sig, "for another hundred worth of groceries I would pick him up and carry him out with me." Then, after a moment's thought: "But will he see me?"

"Probably not," said Thee.

So Sig went out and took a long walk and thought it over, and decided to go and see Mabel Saugus, a wise counsellor. In three days he was due to get from Mabel a cheque for fifty dollars, his monthly allowance; he asked her to give it to him now, and also the next month's. When she asked him what he meant to do with it, he said he was going to the bank and get a new hundred-dollar note, and enclose it in an envelope with a letter saying that this was to pay for five minutes of Mr. George Reverdy Mills's time in an interview.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mabel. "Suppose he keeps it?"

"I don't think he will. But if he does, I'll have to live on my share of Old Thee's hundred dollars' worth of beans and rice."

XI

Sig wrote the letter on a piece of very good stationery which Mabel gave him, and he got the money at the bank, and went to the office in the Golden State Building which had on the outside the defiant inscription: "George Reverdy Mills: Capitalist." He entered and gave his note to the secretary, and sat down—he literally had to, because of the way his knees were trembling.

Presently the man came back and escorted him into the private office; and there sat a small, dried-up, alert old gentleman at an old-fashioned mahogany desk, glaring at him through black-rimmed glasses tied with a black silk ribbon, and holding the hundred-dollar bill in two thin fingers, which shook, not because he was excited, but because he was slightly palsied. Also he was slightly deaf, and had a little black thing stuck in one ear, connected with a sound box on his desk. "Well, what's this?" he demanded, in a startlingly loud voice.

"Mr. Mills," said Sig, "that bill represents what I was supposed to live on for the next two months. I'm gambling it for a talk with you."

"I'm not a hundred-dollar man," said the other, scornfully. "I'm a million-dollar man"—and he threw the bill contemptuously at his visitor. Of course an unfolded bill does not throw very well, and it lay on the desk for the next two hours, tormenting poor Sig and distracting his thoughts.

"I came to see you," said the visitor, "because several persons who know you have told me that you are the hardest nut to crack in San Sebastian, and that if you'll go in with me they will too."

"Trying to flatter me, hey?" roared Old George. "Well, what have you got? A gold mine? Or is it platinum?"

"Something far more valuable than anything of the sort, Mr. Mills. I have an idea."

"Inventor, hey?"

"No, not that."

"Then you're a nut?"

Not a very promising opening! When Sig let the cat out of the bag, that he had come here to waste Old George's time talking to him about a lot of bums and derelicts, the elderly capitalist blew up in most alarming fashion. "I know who sent you here!" he shouted. "This is a trick of Thee Fleming's!"

"Mr. Mills," said Sig, "I am speaking for three hundred men whom you call 'bums.' I know them all, and there may be two or three bums among them—we're waiting to be sure before we fire them. But most of them are men who have worked all their lives—and it's been hard work too. If they can't find jobs now it is surely not their fault."

"Don't talk rot to me!" cried the old man. "There's always work for men that will put their brains into it."

"That's exactly what was said about our co-op this very day by Mr. Harry Simkin, the wood and coal man. You know him?"

"I know who he is."

"Well, he heard my story, and he said frankly that he had misunderstood us—that we had a real idea and were putting brains into our work. He promised to trade with us for that very reason."

But Old George wasn't going to hear about Simkin, he wasn't going to let himself be "landed" by any device whatsoever. He fought like a tarpon—but it was a tarpon on a hook. He scolded, he stormed—and two or three times he

ordered this intruder out of his office; but each time Sig would say something to provoke another tirade; and of course politeness then compelled him to stay and listen to it. Never did the big fellow have more need of that psychology which he had studied in the forecastles of ships and in mining camps!

What finally landed George was the Communists. In spite of all his defiance, the old gentleman could not down the idea of a Bolshevik uprising, *à la russe*. He made jokes about it frequently, but it was the "true word spoken in jest." He had a recurrent dream about himself being shot in a cellar.

In all his life he had never met a real Communist; but here was a fellow who admitted that he had been married to one, and had lived among them. He claimed to have the only way to keep the Communists from getting you if you didn't watch out—in fact, he was doing the watching, so he claimed. If the unemployed could be allowed to trade for cabbages and beans and firewood, they would be too busy to listen to agitators, and they wouldn't form mobs and riot in the streets, and maybe overcome the police and raid the home where George Reverdy Mills kept his Japanese prints and Chinese porcelains, and lived with a family of cowed ladies who hated him in their secret hearts, and wondered if they were going to outlive him and get his money.

So, at the end of the two-hour duel, it transpired that George Reverdy Mills was another tired old man. He had spent himself in anger, and had been brought to realize that there were a lot of things in the world he didn't know. He had the power of money, but here was a man with another kind of power, which also might be useful in a crisis. Such a man as this, if you made a friend of him, might be the means of keeping you from being shot in a cellar!

So here was Old George, talking in a quite matter-of-fact way about a business deal with the co-op. At the back of his place he had twenty acres of lemons. They looked pretty, and he had had the foolish notion that it was part of a country gentleman's role to grow fruit. He had to keep them up for the sake of looks; but it didn't pay to pick them, and it offended George's sense of order to let commission men and railroads make money while he lost it. Last year the people who had picked the crop on shares had stolen most of it. In short, Old George was sick of the very name of a lemon; and so Sig could have a chance to prove to an elderly capitalist

that there was one group of honest people doing business in California.

The deal, in brief, became this: the co-op was to prune the trees, and get all the lemons on the prunings for that service; they were to pick the rest of the crop for half; and if they found any way to trade for George's half, they were to have the right to buy it for cash, at the market. "Or maybe you can work it off for me," said the tired old man.

"What we're going to do, Mr. Mills," said Sig, confidently, "is to take over the running of your place. When you get to know us, you will tell us what you want done, and then you won't have to think about it any more."

It was after office hours when that battle ended, and Thee Fleming had gone to his home. But Sig took the liberty of calling him on the phone to tell him about it, and the old man was so tickled at having got the better of his crony that he kept Sig standing in a pay station for ten minutes to recite the details. Then Sig called Charlie, to report on the grand day's work; then he called Mabel Saugus, to let her know that he had got his hundred dollars back! On top of all his other acquisitions, he got a good dinner free, for Mabel begged him to come up, and he spent the dinner hour telling again about his day's adventures among the hardest-boiled exploiters of San Sebastian!

"You see, Mabel," declared Sig, "we've got a real idea! It's going to spread, and it's not going to stop till it's reached the whole United States! "

CHAPTER VIII

POLITICS

I

THE sign in black and gold letters on the window of the office read: "Angus McTeagle, Insurance and Loans." There were several desks, but only a solitary stenographer in the front office, and not much for her to do; for while everyone would have been glad to be insured against the troubles of the time, few had money to pay for it; and as for loans, there

were a hundred million potential borrowers, and very few lenders.

However, there was something always going on in the back office, away from the public view. By a rear entrance there came many bringers of news and departed many bearers of orders. For McTeagle had taken the advice of the psychologists and health specialists who tell you how to live long; he had got himself something to play with in his leisure time. Since nearly all his time was leisure now, his hobby had become his work. It had grown into such proportions as the most enthusiastic hobbyist could hardly have dreamed; it had taken possession of the city of Seaview, in which McTeagle's office was located, and then of Seaview County, and it was apparently on the way to dominate the state of California.

This hobby was producers' co-operatives. For most of a lifetime Angus McTeagle had preached this idea, and had seen the beginnings of half a dozen puny efforts, foredoomed to failure. But now suddenly had come this depression, and supplied millions of guinea-pigs for his experimentations. There were, during this year 1933, seventeen million persons out of work, and if you counted their families, that meant thirty or forty millions who might live by co-operation, and could hardly live otherwise. Truly, the harvest was plenteous and the labourers few!

It was Angus McTeagle's hard luck that he had had to wait too long for this opportunity. He was now a very old man, who had lost the last hair on his head several years ago. He was also handicapped by the fact that he had accumulated weight, and had to carry a big paunch with him wherever he went. When he managed to get this burden out upon a platform, he produced from it an enormous voice, a combination of bass viol and kettledrum, rumbling sarcasm and denunciation. But mostly the old man preferred to sit in his back office and give counsel, and let other and younger men do the errands.

He had a host of followers, who knew him as "McTickle," and made endless puns about the name. When one of the county supervisors hesitated to vote funds for the unemployed, the word would be: "We'll get Mac to tickle him." When the police were too prompt in throwing the unemployed out of their tenements, the members of the co-op would say: "They need a little McTickling."

There had sprung up during the past year some two or three hundred organizations, calling themselves by a great variety of names: barter groups, goodwill societies, emergency committees, unemployed salvagers, relief stations, citizens' leagues, self-help associations, industrial units. To keep track of them, it had been found necessary to give them numbers; and if they were to have a common policy, and trade among themselves, there had to be a central office and a card file. This had been set up in a big loft over the workroom of one of the largest groups. It was a busy place, like a political headquarters at the height of a campaign; but everybody knew that the place where the real decisions were made was the little back room of Angus McTeagle's office.

"Mac" had two cronies whose advice he took, and these three were called "the triumvirate," or by the irreverent, "the holy trinity." One of these was Dan Riker, who had begun life as a boxer, and still kept his training, and found it useful more than once. He was an unemployed longshoreman, who had helped to start a group in his home town, and had turned it into a weapon for combating the red tape of the relief agencies. Through this conflict he had risen to prominence among the unemployed, and was now their leader on the firing line.

The third member was known as "Bumpy" Jones. He was a short, rotund man with the oddest of heads; a big bump at the back, and two over the forehead; his nose was a bump, and so was his chin, and his cheeks were two bumps. His face was a bright pink, and the bumps were painted red as if by a "cosmetician." Bumpy had a sense of humour, and was the diplomatist of the trio, also the errand boy; he hopped into his car and travelled to this "unit" or that, and put through deals and passed orders to faithful henchmen. Of course he had the whole card catalogue in his head, and so did each of the others; when they talked about "Number 159," they knew not merely that it was the "Community Warehouse of Santa Cecilia," but they also knew who was running it, and what he was doing that was good or bad.

II

It is unfortunately the fact that in the management of any enterprise involving the fortunes of two hundred thousand

men, it will be impossible to please everybody. There will be many who insist that some other course would be better than the one being followed. There will be some who aspire to leadership, and will take up an opposition programme, not because it is better, but because they can use it as a means to gain power. There will be some in power who identify themselves with a certain policy, and defend it, not because it is the best, but because it is theirs, and advocacy of any other programme becomes treason.

In short, when you are controlling the destinies of two hundred thousand men, you are in politics, and all the arts common to politics will be forced upon you. You will build a "machine"; you will put your followers in power and keep them there, and keep your enemies out; or, if you neglect to do this, your enemies will build the "machine" and put you out. Before long you will find yourself doing things which you would prefer not to do, but which you fear the other fellow will do first.

Furthermore, it appears to make no difference how noble and altruistic may be your purposes. It has been found to be the same among bishops and cardinals; it has been found to be the same even among perfect ladies, such as the Daughters of the American Revolution or the United Daughters of the Confederacy. So how could it fail to be the case among a couple of hundred thousand "down-and-outers" in a country like America, with so much violence, so much crime, and so many different kinds of corruption?

If you listened to the enemies of Angus McTeagle, you would hear that he and his "gang" had turned co-operation into a "racket." You would hear that he had manipulated elections, and stuffed ballot boxes, and had his enemies beaten up. You would even hear that he had poisoned one of his rivals, and now had the body on ice in one of the warehouses, and was afraid to have a funeral for fear of the publicity. Whether he had really poisoned anybody, or ever had a body on ice—how could any rank-and-file member of a co-operative know? Such a person might as well expect to know whether his city councillor was in the pay of the gas company, or whether his United State senator was taking orders from the munitions trust.

This much was certain: there was a huge sprawling movement for self-help, by and for the unemployed. It had several

hundred "units" all over the state, most of them with several hundred members each, and a few with several thousand. They were formed into a loose federation, and every now and then they would split up, or form a rival organization, with some long title, such as the United Unemployed Co-operative Association, very difficult to remember. Each unit would get some empty building for an "industrial centre," and from it would start what was apt to turn into a campaign of wholesale begging. They had nothing, and they needed everything, and tried to get it by every method short of stealing.

There were a few sources of food open to them; the bakers had stale bread, the grocers had dented and damaged cans, the greengrocers had spoiled cabbages and wilted lettuce—and this they would give to the unemployed, and sometimes add a little saleable food for conscience' sake. People would give old clothes and junk of one sort or another—a broken bicycle, a radio set without tubes, a cast-off auto tyre. It was against the law to beg, but if you were offering labour in exchange for goods, then the police could not touch you, and if you had a big and noisy organization behind you, they would not.

Another source of supplies was the relief authorities. In the days of Hoover, the private charities had run soup kitchens and local public officials had distributed baskets of groceries. But now President Roosevelt had remembered the "forgotten man," and Congress had established the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, which was to give money to the states for distribution to the destitute. The co-operatives would besiege the relief offices; it was a perpetual war as to how aid was to be distributed, whether in cash or in commodities, and whether to individuals or through the various "units." If the latter method was adopted, manifestly it would be of great help to those who were trying to build co-operatives. But did the governments want co-operatives, and if so, of what kind?

The government could never make up its mind. Each new "administrator" would announce a new policy, and then in a week or two, often before it had got into effect, he would resign, or be superseded, or get new orders from above. The result was that the "units" were kept in continual confusion and uproar. They would hold meetings, and rage and denounce; they would invite the relief officials to confer, and if one was indiscreet enough to attend a meeting, he would be heckled and shouted down. The unemployed would storm the relief

offices, and get themselves clubbed by the police. They would keep the politicians in misery; they would put up their own leaders for public office—and even before the campaign had started, the leaders would be bought off with jobs.

But one main policy became clear: city councilmen and county supervisors, relief officials both local and Federal, and committees of businessmen and sympathetic club ladies, might admit that the unemployed should have food and clothing, and enough cash for carfare and gas and electricity; but never would they give them the tools of production. Or if they did have tools, they must be old and inefficient, and never new and modern. They might get a "grant" to buy sewing machines, but it must be the old-style foot-treadle kind, never a power machine; they might get a cobbler's kit, but never machinery to make shoes; they might get a plough, but hardly a horse, and never a tractor. Thus, in the summer of that year and of the next two, the state of California saw a strange spectacle in the vacant lots of its cities and towns: one man guiding a plough, and half a dozen men hitched together with ropes to drag it!

III

It was difficulties and confusions such as these that Angus McTeagle and Dan Riker and Bumpy Jones were discussing one afternoon towards the end of the summer. When people could not pay their light bills, it was the practice of the company to seal the meter; and one of the members of Unit 34 had broken the seal and connected up the wires, and had been arrested. There was a movement on the part of the whole group to break their seals, and with a few words of encouragement it would become an insurrection.

Also, there were people being evicted, and here again mass resistance was being urged. A group of Seventh-Day Adventists, a poor people's church, had started a praying and hymn-singing campaign in the homes of those threatened with eviction: they had filled the home so full of singers and prayers that the sheriff's men could not get in. It was a question of organizing a flying squadron of religious experts, and a system of notifying them when the sheriff's men were to appear. Dan Riker had got what he called a "line" into the sheriff's office, and was to have advance warning by telephone.

Then Bumpy Jones made a report on a trip. He had spent

a day in the city of San Sebastian, trying to persuade the co-op there to affiliate itself with the "Central," and accept the designation of "Unit 247." Bumpy was forced to report failure. "That guy Charlie Day has a head like a mule," he declared. "I spent four hours arguing with him, and he wouldn't budge."

"What's the matter with him?" asked Mac.

"He says we're a bunch of politicians, and they don't want to get into it. He says we're making enemies, and the big business crowd will put us out of business as soon as they get cross enough."

"A fine time he'll have makin' friends with 'em!" growled Dan Riker.

"That's what he says they're doing. They got a guy named Soren in charge of their contact work, and he goes to see these big bugs, and persuades 'em, and gets a hundred dollars, and they think they've ended the depression. Day says they have their own local problems, and their own way of meeting 'em, and they don't want outside interference."

"What's his basic idea?" demanded Mac. "He can't be a complete fool."

"He's not a fool by any means. He's got his own little machine, and he don't want to take any chance of losing his grip. What he says is, they're concentrating on getting tools of production; he says we're turning our people into wholesale pan-handlers."

"My God!" cried Dan. "As if we didn't beg for tools!"

"He says we asked wrong; we should 'a' been polite and tactful. They started out by getting a dragsaw, and they been cutting a lot o' wood; now they got a grant from Washington of five thousand dollars to buy two trucks; so they're feeling set up."

"They got that because of our agitation!" declared Mac. "We raise the devil and frighten the authorities—and then they give the loan to the tame ones, so as to show the people the right way to go about it."

"They're a bunch o' scabs, that's what they are!" declared Dan. "We go on strike, an' suffer an' starve, an' they come along an' get the reward of it."

"We can't let them get away with it," said the big fellow. "If we do, we'll have a lot of independent units, all working at cross purposes. Their basic idea is crazy—having fifteen

or twenty different lines of production, all in one institution. How can you ever get mass production that way? "

"I argued that out with Day. He says they're taking no gifts, they're going to pay with their labour for the tools of production."

"My God! It passes belief what fool economic notions men will get into their heads! "

"Well, I told Day about our programme, to build each co-op around one industry, and then set up warehouses and trading centres. But he says it's too big a threat to the capitalists, and they'll smash it."

"Maybe they will, but we'll give them a fight, by heck. We're going to get the unemployed behind us in a mass army, and with one general to command."

"Yes, and you be that general," said Dan, with his prize-fighter's look.

"Well, you can rest sure of this," asserted Bumpy; "we'll never get Charlie Day to work with us. When I threatened him with trouble he told me to go to hell."

"We'll have to win the rank and file away from him. Show them what's wrong with that policy."

"It ain't goin' to be so easy, Mac. They got what they call a 'round table.' They set down every day after work, and the section heads put their problems on the table, and the rank and file listen in. Twice a week they have what they call a co-ordinating assembly, and all the people talk things out. Day has got them sold on the idea that they're running the show their own way."

"That's all right; we'll sell 'em the idea to run it our way. We have to send some fellows to get next to them, and make them understand what we're doing here in Seaview, and why we're growing so fast."

"I got the lad in mind for that job," said Bumpy Jones. "You know Jimmie Small? "

"It can't be anybody they'll know up there."

"He's got a good excuse for going—his wife has been staying with her folks in San Sebastian. He'll take along three or four other fellows that will just drop in casual-like. We'll have to give 'em a little money."

"Make sure they know what it's all about," said Dan Riker. "We don't want to slip again like we done in Oilville."

"You talk to 'em yourself, if you want to," said Bumpy: "I know it ain't goin' to be easy to put down that feller Day."

"What we've got to do," said McTeagle, "is to throw another scare into these SERA people, and make them give us some more food grants. That car-load of beans just about saved our lives."

IV

That night an automobile with five men in it set out from Seaview, and deposited four of them in San Sebastian; and next morning an experienced garage mechanic by the name of James Thomas Small presented himself before the personnel department of the Self-Help Exchange on South Verdugo Street. He was lanky, almost cadaverous, and had strikingly black hair dropping to his eyes; it was easy for Thomas Cullen to believe that he had been out of work for a long time. He had been looking for a job in Seaview, he explained, and had returned to San Sebastian because his wife was staying with her people here. He was accepted as a member of the garage section, which had more work to offer because of two fine new trucks which had just been purchased on a Federal grant, and would be driven in three eight-hour shifts.

It was comical, to one who knew the inside story of Jimmie Small's mission; he wanted to make trouble—and here it was, coming to meet him! Hardly had he finished signing his name to the membership form when there was an uproar in the passage outside, and everybody in the personnel room jumped up and ran out. Eight or ten men in working clothes were storming into the headquarters, declaring that they would not work any longer under that good-for-nothing high-brow boss they had, and they were on strike right then and there. Here came Charlie Day, hurrying downstairs, and telling them they wouldn't have to yell so loud if they wouldn't all talk at once.

In the centre of the warehouse stood the big "round table" which had become a leading feature of the co-op. This table was of oval shape, about eighteen feet in length and twelve at its widest; built in four sections, so that it could be taken apart and carried out of the way of other affairs. There were chairs around it for as many as twenty-five persons; and Charlie now invited the insurgents to take some of these chairs

"Here's where we clear all our troubles," said he. "Most of you are new men, and don't understand how we work these things."

They sat down, and the headquarters workers and visitors took the other seats, to observe the adjustment of this "strike." The strikers agreed upon a spokesman, who told all that was wrong with their boss, and what he had done which caused the sudden uprising.

"Men," said Charlie, "we agreed in the beginning we'd have no bosses. We used to call them supervisors, but that didn't make it clear, so we changed it to co-ordinators. He is supposed to co-ordinate what you are doing. You know you can't lay that pipe just any old way; somebody has got to see that the joints are tight and that the ditch is level."

They admitted that; but they had got the wrong kind of "co-ordinator"; he wore a white collar, and gave himself airs—

"But, men," said Charlie, patiently, "this fellow used to be the purchasing agent of a big railroad, and if he wears a white collar, maybe it's all he's got; maybe he hasn't money to buy working clothes. I happen to know he has a sick wife, and maybe he spent the money for medicines."

"But he thinks he's too good for us—he rides up to the job in his own car!"

"How do you know that's it? Maybe you didn't invite him to ride with you. Maybe he thought there wasn't room. Has anybody tried to make friends with him?"

They were a little abashed; and Charlie went on to explain that if they didn't like their co-ordinator, they could call a meeting of the section, and vote to replace him; they had the power to do that. Apparently they didn't understand just what a co-operative was, and that they themselves owned the tools they worked with and the product. "You say you're on strike," said Charlie; "but there's nobody to strike against but yourselves; there's nobody else you can hurt. That job you're doing is traded for food—including some watermelons that you're to eat at the dance to-night. I made the deal myself, and was sort of proud of it."

The strikers felt sheepish, and said they would go back to the pipe, which they had left up in the hills several miles away. "It's all right," said the big boss, as he shook hands with them. "We have an insurrection like this about once

a month. But there's magic in this round table; when you sit in these chairs you see it different."

V

The Saturday evening dance was held in a nearby hall which could be got on "points"; for the warehouse had long since been outgrown for such affairs. The Self-Help Exchange now had more than seven hundred members; and if you counted wives and children, as you had to for dances, there was a big crowd.

The men hurried home from work and put on their best clothes, if they had any left. The women got out their ribbons and doodads, and fixed their hair, and saw that their men's hair was slicked down smooth. Everyone came with a smile; even though there was no food in the house, there must be cheer for a dance night. And besides, after the dance there were always doughnuts and coffee, and to-night there was a special rumour—watermelons! "Big time!" said the sign on the bulletin board.

Clem Jett came with his violin—a regular country fiddler he was, who knew all the old tunes, "Turkey in the Straw" and "Dancing in the Barn," the ones our grandfathers and grandmothers used to know. He had taught them to a couple of other fiddlers—oh, they were a talented bunch at the Self-Help Exchange, old man depression hadn't got them down. Cristy Jett played his banjo, and there was a chorus of mouth-organs, and when things got livened up, Cristy would start singing—he would make up funny gags about what was going on in the co-op, or maybe right there on the floor. He would sing the "Arkansaw Traveller"—a dialogue of crazy questions and answers, always funny, and never vulgar. Cristy had some of that in dance time, and people would laugh so they could hardly go on.

People who work hard all day don't like to stay up late at night, so they came early and went right at it. They led off with a double quadrille, that got nearly everybody on to the floor. Cristy would stand on a cracker box and call the figures, loud and commanding. The little man from the Red River country was in his glory here—"grand chain" and "grand right and left all round"—the old boys would limber up and caper, it made them feel like two-year-olds. "Ladies

to the right"—and old women who had worn their fingers and their eyes over a sewing machine all day would remember the time when they had been young, and life had seemed a dazzle; they would advance and bow and back away, and be so happy that tears would stand in their eyes. "Sashay your partners"—and around they would go, old skirts flying!

"Swing her high, and swing her low,
And now you let that lady go!"

A wonderful thing this co-op had proved for those women who had been lucky enough to find work with it. The depression had been even harder on women than on men. For the latter there was companionship on street corners and park benches; there were pool-rooms where they could sit, and vacant lots where they could watch horseshoe pitching, and enjoy the fresh air and sunshine. But for the women there was a dreary home, and solitude, or the companionship of children who whimpered with hunger and cold; an empty larder, and nothing to do, unless to patch and re-patch worn clothing; they sat with drawn faces, awaiting the return of the man at night, empty-handed, weak and ill, or cross and embittered.

But now there was work for at least a few women; and a place where they enjoyed social life while working. A dozen of them sewed and chatted; another dozen canned fruit; others dressed dolls, and repaired and painted toys, and made patch-work quilts; they went out into the fields and harvested fruit and vegetables. The co-op took the curse off the depression for these women; they no longer cowered with shame, they learned that everybody was in the same plight, and it was no disgrace. They came out and met the enemy in the open.

It was an education, too, as good as going to a school of economics. The lives of these women had been narrow, their outlook had been confined to kitchen and nursery; they had been crushed by taboos, and notions of what was "respectable." They had sat in their separate little homes, watching with terror the slow dwindling of their savings; giving up one by one the treasures they had been trying to pay for in instalments—the plush furniture in the parlour, the radio set, the washing machine. They had borrowed from relatives not much better off than themselves; with agonies of humiliation

they had visited the pawnshops. They had suffered physical deterioration, and seen their children waste away, because their code did not permit them to seek or receive "charity."

But here was a place where everybody was poor. Those who worked here talked about it openly, and made a joke of things which before could hardly be spoken out loud. There wasn't food enough, and there wasn't work enough, but at least there was something, and the effort to make more; there was courage, and good-fellowship, and real religion, made for every day. There were some who had learned the causes of the depression, and could explain how it had come and how it could be made to go.

All that applied, of course, only to those women whom the co-op had been able to put to work. Unfortunately there were a couple of hundred on the waiting list, for whom there were as yet no tools and no materials. The women had set up a contact section of their own, to seek work which women could do; and many and strange were the offers brought in—not merely nursing the sick and reading to the aged and boarding children in their parents' absence, but growing meal worms for a bird store, and answering letters for a matrimonial agency, and exercising brook trout in a washing machine to keep their flesh firm!

VI

The dance was going on. Sometimes the modern dances which the young people demanded, for reasons which the old could not understand. So monotonous, just holding each other in your arms and walking around! The old folks begged for the good old kind, that had life in them: the Virginia reel, and the lancers, and the one in which they sang about old Dan Tucker who was late for his supper—"All shake hands with old Dan Tucker!" And the schottische—does anybody remember the schottische?—a run and a skip, and a run and two skips, and down the room they went; the tripping music got into their feet, even the feet of the dignified Bill Mase, the Socialist old-timer, and of Scotty Adams, the stoop-shouldered elderly carpenter—they would kick up their toes, and grin, and Cristy Jett would thump his banjo and shout: "Yip-pee!"

People make friends quickly on such occasions; and here

was this new man, a member only since that morning, Mr. Small, who was going to work in the garage. He was a comical dancer, it appeared; so lean that he looked like a caricature, and when he capered his long black hair flopped up and down as if it had been a wig. Presently it was discovered that he could dance a "hoedown"—he and Pete Shaver competing with each other, trying to wear each other down, and Cristy playing the fiddle so fast, it was a race between fingers and feet. Jimmie Small's lean face displayed such extraordinary animation, really it was as good as a vaudeville show, and the spectators broke out into laughter and applause.

And then refreshments; you're really interested in them after a couple of hours of such fun. All day Mr. Rendant, the big bald-headed baker, had been working in the bakeshop, with three ladies to help him; rolling out dough and cutting those round shapes of which it has been said the optimist sees the food while the pessimist sees the hole. "How many shall I make?" he always asked of the round table; and the chorus would be: "Six for me!" and then "Double the order!" Fascinating to watch the dough-rings swell out, and turn brown in the boiling hot grease; but no doubt after you had watched it a thousand times in one day, the thrill wore off.

Anyhow, here they were, whole traysful; and cups of steaming hot coffee—not enough cups to go around, and especially not enough handles; you were not supposed to "dunk" your doughnut, but to empty your cup quickly so that it could be washed in the back room and used again. It was funny how they had obtained flour and sugar and coffee for these refreshments; the relief administrator had invented a new wrinkle, he wouldn't give anything to the co-op in bulk, even though the members on relief might request it in writing. No, just now the arrangement was that each individual must receive his individual share of coffee, of sugar, of whatever it might be. A ton of flour would have to be weighed out in small lots and put into small sacks, and called for and signed for and carried away by each individual; and then they would carry it to the co-operative bakery, and dump it into the common bin, and get so many points in credit for it, and then have it baked into doughnuts for the dance. That was the kind of thing you had to learn to laugh at in order to keep from weeping!

The story of the bakery was curious. The little oven in the

warehouse had been quickly outgrown, and the contact section had found a bakery where they made dog biscuits for the pets of the well-to-do of San Sebastian. Apparently there were not so many pets during the depression, or they were not so abundantly fed, for the bakery was idle part of the time; so a deal was worked out whereby the members of the co-op worked for the owner three days in the week, and had the use of the bakery for their own work the other three. From the relief people they got bleached flour, of not too high a grade; but for the dogs they had the very best whole wheat flour and government inspected meat, also wheat germ as used in hospitals, and vitamin D imported from England. There was many a co-opper heard to wish that during the depression at least he might change place with some lucky dog which lived up on the heights above the city!

But nobody thought about such things to-night; everybody was happy and friendly. The energetic Mr. Small wiped the perspiration from his face and neck, and got a tray and helped distribute cups of coffee, and smiled and bowed to everybody, and made many friends. He invited the old ladies to dance with him, he patted the old men on the back and said he hoped he'd have as much left at their age; he complimented the musicians, and made Cristy Jett a friend for life by telling him a couple of new crazy questions and answers for the "Arkansaw Traveller."

He was introduced to Sig Soren, the big fellow who was head of the contact section, and was said to have got a lot of the rich people of the city interested in the co-op; he was introduced to one of these important persons, Miss Mabel Saugus, who had taken up the institution as her hobby, and came to most of its affairs. Jimmie knew how to make friends with her, because it happened that he came from the part of the state where the Saugus family had its ranch, and Jimmie's father had heard it said that there was salt under that ranch long before the Saugus children had been born.

VII

The next day was what is called "the morning after," and is notoriously not so happy a time. Many of these people did not have what they considered good enough clothes to go to church in; if they still had the family "bus," they lacked

gasolene or tyres. They hadn't food enough to make what would pass as a "Sunday dinner," and nobody came to see them in the afternoon. They had no money for a movie in the evening, nor even for a Sunday newspaper—nothing to do but sit at home and brood over their troubles.

Of the members of the Self-Help Exchange, there were perhaps a hundred who really understood its principles, and were able to keep smiling in spite of gnawing stomachs. The rest were either too new to the project, or else did not have the mentality ever to share its great hope. To them the co-op was just a promise of a job, and one that took a long time being kept. Why couldn't the leaders give them more to do? And why, when they had earned their "points," could they buy so little with them?

The masses of America were being subjected to a slow process of suffocation; the squeezing of their standards of living, their happiness in the present and their prospects for the future. They were being turned from free citizens into something like Chinese coolies, who live on a handful of rice a day and one cotton shirt every year. They did not understand the inexorable economic force behind this process, and they blamed some individual—and of course it had to be an individual who was near enough for them to see him and recognize him.

They could not pay their gas bills, and the gas company came and shut off their supply, or put in one of those meters into which you had to feed a quarter before it would work; for that they blamed the greedy octopus which dominated their city government. When their electric light was shut off and they had to sit in darkness at night, they blamed Thee Fleming, who was head of the Golden State Light and Power Company, and lived in a palace up in the hills, where his wife gave costly parties. Even the fact that he had let them have the dragsaw did not help for long; because, after all, they had paid with hard labour for that saw, and they couldn't light their homes with firewood.

Their children whined with hunger, they saw them growing pale and spindly in the legs—and whom should they blame for that? The leaders of the co-op explained that the relief administrators were doling out money and food as slowly as they dared, for fear of the complaints of the taxpayers. But taxpayers were vague and remote—while that Mrs. Berry, who

sat at a desk and asked you insulting questions about your private life, and then gave you a niggardly grocery order, good only for the very cheapest foods—the “coolie” standard of living—that lady was near, and it was a temptation to “bust out” at her. When you went to the grocery store and started to walk along the shelves and look at the foods, and the clerk would call out loud: “No use to go over there, you can’t have any of those things!”—who could blame you if you wanted to throw a can of beans at his head?

It was inevitable that some of this blind resentment should fall upon the leaders of the Self-Help Exchange. Why could they never keep food in the commissary? Why was it that when you got in late, everything was “out”? The leaders were ready with excuses—but a man couldn’t take those home for the family supper. A few times in the course of ten months they had enjoyed that much talked of “economy of abundance”; walnuts, lemons, cabbages, apricots, and now tomatoes—yes, just now they had acres of tomatoes, and were shipping by the truckload to canneries; but good Lord, a family couldn’t live on tomatoes, after a while you got sick of the very word. Why couldn’t they enjoy an economy of abundance in milk, or butter, or cheese, or bacon, or any sort of fresh meat?

Patiently the leaders would point out that they could only get what they could produce. To get milk you had to have cows and a dairy; or else you had to make some sort of deal with a farmer—and you had nothing to trade but labour, and few farmers needed labour all the year round. When you had a couple of thousand people dependent upon your commissary, that was, at the lowest calculation, a thousand dollars’ worth of food you had to provide every time the sun rose; three hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars’ worth of food every year—and here were the people of the contact section, having to spend their time figuring out where to get a few poles for beans to grow on, or some wire or cord to tie them up with!

“We just have to make up our minds that we can’t live out of the commissary at this stage.” So Charlie Day would tell them, over and over again at the assemblies. “Nobody ever promised to do it, and there’s no good fooling ourselves. We can’t be independent until we can get big tools, a mass production system in at least one line. It doesn’t matter what it is—lumber or oil or fishing, it’s got to be some extractive industry, where we take the wealth from nature, and we own the pro-

duct. Until that time we are dependent upon the relief people, and we've got to make the best terms we can with them, and try to get them to understand self-help and production for use."

That was the truth, wisely and frankly stated; but it didn't stop the crying of the children, nor the impatience in the hearts of the parents. If many of them listened to other voices and took up other ideas, they could hardly be blamed; they were like a man in a convulsion, who strikes about him blindly, and tears his own flesh, or bites his tongue to pieces. All doctors know that happens, and those who study and seek to treat the social body know that starving people will take to crime, to rioting, and to desperate plotting.

VIII

There had sprung up in San Sebastian an organization of the unemployed, not for the purpose of making work, but to put pressure on politicians and relief administrators. It was led by various kinds of "radicals," and of course the Communists were active in it. At this time the Communist "line" was to denounce all other leaders of working-class movements as "Social Fascists"; and that meant that when the Communists got into a movement most others got out, and it became an instrument of "class war," bitter and suspicious, relying upon mass agitation, and culminating in some form of martyrdom. The "Unemployed Assistance League" would assemble a band of half-starved, frantic people, and lead them to relief offices, and raise a disturbance, and of course the police would be called and some heads would be clubbed and some people taken to jail.

One of the leaders thus arrested bore the name of Joe Timmick; and when Charlie saw his picture in the paper he exclaimed, "Why, hello! Our old friend of Pipe City!" He showed it to Tom Cullen; yes, no doubt about it, it was "No-socks," the temporary proprietor of that piece of sewer pipe in which Charlie and Tom and Pete Shaver had spent a night and talked out the project of the Self-Help Exchange. Pipe City had been abandoned in the spring, because the company which made the pipe had found a market for it; Joe and some of the other denizens had fixed themselves a new "Hooverville" on the outskirts of San Sebastian, and now were forcing the city

to provide them with food and lodgings in the jail. "You remember he said that we had inspired him with new rage," said Charlie, with a smile.

But it wasn't a smiling matter to many in the co-op, because they had friends and relatives among the agitators. Of course these agitators sought the backing of the Self-Help Exchange; they wanted money for defence, they wanted recruits to join the demonstrations, and if these things were refused, they became angry, and would get up in the assemblies and deliver long tirades; if you tried to get on to other business, it was a violation of the rights of free speech.

So there had come to be a rebel group in the co-op, and agitation going on all the time. There are always persons whose idea of co-operation is to have their own way; and some who are against whatever form of authority may be. For example, Mrs. Jane Pitter, frail and shrill little woman who had got up at the first meeting in Grace Methodist Church and denounced the relief authorities; Mrs. Pitter had a brother who had taken part in the demonstration, and was now lying in the hospital with a fractured skull; Mrs. Pitter was frantic with fear and anger, and could not talk about anything else, and wanted the co-op to go on the warpath to keep her brother out of jail, and apparently to send the relief administrators there in his place.

It was awkward, because Mrs. Pitter was co-ordinator of the sewing section; having put herself there at the start, by her energy and determination. No one questioned her sincerity, but many did think she was too emotional to have charge of a body of women who had to be kept from getting into little personal misunderstandings, as women in groups have a tendency to do. Now, because of her absorption in the affairs of the Unemployed Assistance League, Mrs. Pitter became impossible as a section co-ordinator; of course, when she was voted out, it was taken as a "class action," and Mrs. Pitter became a martyr, and a voluble one, who went about among all the membership telling her troubles, and telling all sorts of stories about the co-op, some true, and some not entirely so.

She found allies: for example, Ned Petticome, a little man with wide ears, and two large front teeth like a chipmunk. Ned's ears were made for hearing, and his mind was made for putting together hints of what he heard, and making large generalizations, which, as soon as formed, acquired the cer-

tainty of revealed religion. All the world had been against poor Ned all his life. During this depression his wife had cut her own throat, and his children had been put into an institution because he was incompetent to take care of them—or so his enemies had said, and they had had their way. This is a treacherous world, as we know, and Ned watched it, and recognized the signs of fresh conspiracies against him. His section co-ordinator wouldn't give him proper work to do, the clerk in the commissary saw to it that he didn't get enough food—put up to it, of course, by the "higher-ups."

Ned now made a confidante of Mrs. Pitter, and told her all he had learned, and Mrs. Pitter and her left-wing friends listened eagerly. Presently they were joined by a member of the garage section named Jimmie Small, who came to Mrs. Pitter's home one evening, and told her about a friend of his who was employed in the headquarters section, and had studied the accounts, and knew how money was being wasted, and how the co-op was being loaded with debts, and why some foods had been priced so high that the people couldn't afford to buy them. Mr. Small had another friend who knew all about a secret deal which the contact section was making with the new SERA people, whereby the co-op was to be rewarded for refusing to help the Unemployed Assistance League by getting direct grants of spoiled foodstuffs that were to be bought from the big wholesalers—more gambling with the lives of the poor.

"Don't tell anybody I have talked to you," said Jimmie. "I have secret sources of information—they can't fool me. I learned what co-operatives ought to be from the groups in Seaview, where we fight the politicians, and make them put up a lot more money for the unemployed than they do here in San Sebastian."

Mrs. Pitter would rush from one secret meeting to another. The idle people had meetings all day, and those who had work were arguing at night, and there was a revolution impending in the Self-Help Exchange. Everybody was sworn to secrecy—but of course the news leaked quickly, and Charlie Day heard that meetings were taking place, and so did Sig Soren. The latter was worried; but Charlie said: "I'd rather they met publicly, of course; but it's better to meet secretly than not meet at all. It will come into the open by and by, and they'll learn more about their own affairs."

"But suppose they put you out!" cried Sig.

"Maybe somebody else can solve all these problems that I can't," said the "big boss," hopefully.

IX

The pot continued to boil; and a few days later Sig happened to drop in at the home of "Val" Harris, who was head of the accounting department, and whom Sig would have trusted with anything he had. He found a dozen men and women in the living-room, among them Mrs. Pitter and Jimmie Small, and the embarrassed silence which followed Sig's entry told him at once that it was a meeting of the malcontents.

"Let's have it out, folks," he said, cheerfully. "Tell me what it's about."

So there followed an evening's discussion. They trusted Sig, they assured him, and had no quarrel with Charlie either, but they had been forced to the belief that he was not the right man for chairman in these hard days. What was wrong with him? Sig asked; and someone said he wasn't a good businessman. "I hope not," replied Sig. "If he was a good businessman, he would have made a pile of money, and would be using it to exploit all of you, instead of trying to help you as he is. God save us from falling into the hands of a businessman!"

That wasn't what they meant, they said; Charlie had insisted upon a policy which loaded the co-op with debts; here was Val Harris, who would testify that at the present time they owed a total of more than three million six hundred thousand points. Thirty thousand hours of labour! Could you imagine such insanity?

This was a sore spot with many of the members. They were working people, who had been taught that thrift was the greatest of worldly virtues, and to be free from debt the aim of every honest man. Nobody had explained to them that modern business is conducted on credit, and that in many cases a man's success was measured by his ability to contract debts. Patiently Sig Soren showed that, in the first place, their debt was divided among seven hundred members, so each one owed about fifty hours of labour; he could pay it in a week, and would that kill him? In the next place, a good part of it was owed to one another; each member had credits, and if ever the

affairs of the co-op were liquidated, each member's claim would be balanced against the share of debt he owed.

As for what was owed to outsiders, Sig tried to show that this was the measure of their success. They had set out to get the people of the community to trust them, and had succeeded to the amount of a couple of million points. That was their working capital, invested in means of production and transportation; it was their trucks and their tractors, their saws and harrows, their ropes and chains and stoves and kettles and whatnot. The more of such things they could get, the faster they could produce; so, strange as it might seem, the more they got into debt the faster they could get out again.

They were, in truth, a new kind of bank, which stored up labour instead of cash and securities; people invested goods in that bank, with the right to draw out labour in return; and the more they trusted the bank, the less they were in a hurry to close their account. Whoever heard of a banker who worried because people trusted him with too much money?

So the big fellow argued, patiently and kindly, as he had trained himself to do. He made headway with two or three of those present; but others, he saw, did not want to be convinced. What was it they really wanted?

Jimmie Small insisted that the co-op could not get anywhere unless it went into politics; unless they hooked up with the big federation, and put pressure on the public authorities, and kicked the crooks out of office. Mrs. Pitter chimed in that Sig ought to sympathize with that, because he had told her he was interested in politics.

"Of course I'm interested in politics," answered the big fellow. "I'm an American citizen, and so are you all, and politics is part of our job."

"All right," cried the little woman in her shrill voice. "Then why does the co-op have to turn thumbs down every time it's a question of helping a political move?"

"We have a lot of tools," said Sig. "We have saws to cut wood with, and hoes to cut weeds with. We do not demand that the saws be used to cut weeds, nor that the hoes be used to cut wood. We have formed a co-op for the purpose of industrial action: getting ourselves the means of labour and production. What is the sense of taking it from that purpose and trying to use it for politics, to which it is not adapted?"

"But why isn't it?" cried the woman, her thin face

becoming fiery, as it always did when anyone opposed her. "The co-op is known, it has great influence——"

"Its influence is because we have kept it out of politics, Mrs. Pitter. We have went to the businessmen and assured them we were an industrial and not a political organization. If now we break our word to those that trade with us, we will lose a great part of our business. Do you imagine the hidebound Republican businessmen of this town is going to support an organization which goes in for what they call red radicalism?"

Jessie Taylor, a young girl who worked in the clothing section, and was an ardent Communist, wanted to know if the workers were going to remain for ever enslaved to their fears that the big business gang would boycott and starve them. Sig answered that the co-op had never objected to Jessie's working with the Communists, and if some members decided to form a political organization, that was all right, and no one would interfere. They could put up candidates for city council and county supervisors, as they talked of doing; but they ought not try to act in the name of the co-op, they ought to leave the co-op what it had set out to be, an organization for producing goods and trading labour.

X

It turned out that the secret meetings had been considering inviting Sig to become a candidate for chairman to replace Charlie Day. Sig's reply was that if he thought Charlie was following harmful policies, he would say yes; but he thought Charlie was doing as well as a man could do in the midst of many difficulties, and he thought that a majority of the members would vote to support him after matters had been explained to them.

So the meeting broke up; and early next morning Sig got a man in the painting department to fix him a sign, reading as follows:

NOTICE TO ALL MEMBERS

Those who control the policies of the Self-Help Exchange are the following Section Co-ordinators.

Then followed a list of these persons, with their sections; and the statement:

If you are not satisfied with the work of any of these, you may replace them by majority vote of the members of that section.

Sig took this sign to Charlie, and Charlie said, all right, let the notice be nailed up beside the bulletin board. It worked out as Sig had figured; most of the members didn't know so much about the affairs of the co-op; they were tired at night, and went home without attending meetings. But each one knew the section co-ordinator with whom he had dealings, and each knew that this co-ordinator was a hard-working and generally competent person. Now they would stop in front of the sign, and study the names, and members of the different sections would ask one another about this one and that.

The final authority in all affairs of the Self-Help Exchange was the "general assembly," a meeting of all the members. Sig Soren insisted that there must be such an assembly at once, for everybody was arguing, the work was being neglected, and the longer a showdown was delayed, the harder it would be. The members of the co-ordinating committee agreed with him, and the meeting was called in the big auditorium of the high school. It is a wise provision of the California law that citizens may have the use of school buildings in the evenings for all political and educational purposes, and have it free where no admission is charged.

A big crowd came; because Barney Bascom of the *Morning Enterprise* got hold of the story—the opposition had seen to that, it was part of their programme of agitation. Besides the men and women members of the Self-Help Exchange, there were political observers of many points of view, students of co-operation, Socialists and Communists, a few of the high school faculty, and of course many curiosity seekers who had read about the co-op in the papers, and wanted to see it in action.

The members for the most part came directly from their work, and in their working clothes. It happened that this had been a "field-day," so declared because several acres of tomatoes were ripening too fast, and everybody had been ordered into the fields, even the men and women of the headquarters section. ("Tomatoes will not pick themselves," said the notice on the bulletin board.) They had been working in the hot sun all day, filling baskets with ripe fruit, and sort-

ing it into lugs, and loading these upon trucks. They had brushed the dirt from their clothes, but Charlie apologized because it had been impossible to wash the green stain off their hands, and he added that they would excuse anybody who fell asleep.

Behind the chairman were lined up the twenty-one section co-ordinators, the general staff of this industrial army, a serious and competent-looking lot of men and women. They had gradually weeded out the talkers, and those in charge were now mostly tight-lipped people who could see quickly what needed to be done, and then liked to pitch in and do it. Every member of the co-op in the audience knew some one of these persons, and had an opinion of him.

Charlie's opening address contained only half a dozen sentences. "There appears to be some dissatisfaction with the conduct of this organization, and people have been meeting and voicing their grievances. We have called this assembly so that they can say it out loud. I for one beg them to do so, and promise in advance that there won't be any hard feelings on my part. If things are wrong, let's get them straight. If the wrong people are in office, let's vote them out. This is a democratic group, and no one has any idea but to serve it, and help us all."

He sat down, and there was silence. Apparently nobody wanted to start the ball. "Please, somebody, speak up," Charlie had to say; and at last Mrs. Jane Pitter rose. The members knew they would get aplenty from her, and they settled back in their seats.

The little lady in her high-pitched voice told the list of grievances. She began with the stupid and inadequate system of relief, and her quarrel with Charlie because he wouldn't declare active war on this. Encouraged by applause, she warmed up and told about the incompetence of this one and that, about all the blunders she had seen, and how she had tried to protest, and how again and again those in authority had shut her up. She became eloquent about the sufferings of people who never got enough food from the commissary, no matter how hard they worked. Her speech took a good half-hour, and when she sat down it appeared that a large part of the audience was with her.

Then Ned Petticome, the little man with the wide ears, the squirrel teeth, and the intimate knowledge of conspiracies.

It was painful to have all of poor Ned's suspicions talked out in front of newspaper reporters and curiosity seekers; but under the system of democracy there is no other way. It is a fact that there are subnormal persons, and pathological persons, and often they are very good talkers, and it is hard for the average man to recognize them quickly. But a democratic electorate has to learn to recognize them—it is part of the process of self-government.

Then Jessie Taylor, a pale, studious-looking girl with spectacles, made them a soap-box speech, pointing out how the workers were oppressed, and had to fight their exploiters, and what a mistake it was to imagine that you could compromise with these greedy ones. Any organization which did compromise was betraying the workers, and it was nonsense to think you could keep out of politics, because the master class made politics and used it against you. From the applause you would have thought that most of this audience was "Red."

Then old Mr. Harriman, sweet-faced, snow-white hair, and cheeks like winter apples. Once he had built bridges for a great railroad system, and now he raked leaves and pushed a lawn-mower. Regularly at every assembly he rose and explained to them that all their troubles were caused by private ownership of the land, and that their salvation lay in the single tax. He was so kind and gentle that no one could bear to pain him, and they had learned that he never took more than two or three minutes.

Then Jimmie Small. Jimmie said he spoke with hesitation, because he was a new member; but he thought he ought to tell them what he had learned at Seaview, and how much better they were handling matters through the big Federation of Unemployed Co-operatives. There they had a common council and acted as one. They put real pressure on the relief officials, and made them distribute big lots of food through the channels of the federation. The worst mistake they were making in San Sebastian was in starving themselves while trying to earn the tools of production. If they would put the same amount of energy into political pressure, they would get plenty of the things they needed.

XI

All that had taken nearly an hour. Charlie thanked the speakers, and said he supposed it would be fair if he now assigned an equal time to the replies. First he would call on certain of the section co-ordinators to answer specific charges of blundering and unfairness. Would Jerry Mason, of the gardening section, answer Mrs. Pitter's complaint about potatoes for which the commissary had charged four hundred points for a sack, when you could buy them cheaper at the grocery store?

Lean and jaundiced old Jerry, the one-time "unemployable," replied that was one of their blunders, for which the round table had to take the blame. "We was offered a tract of land twenty miles away, and we planted it to potatoes, and we didn't get the normal amount of rain this spring. But the main trouble was the campers stole most of them potatoes, and it was too far away to watch them. We figured to get six hundred and fifty sacks, and we only got one hundred and fifty."

"Will Thomas Cullen tell us what those potatoes actually cost?" asked Charlie.

"They figured out seven hundred and fifty points per sack," said the little manager, who had recently been put in charge of the headquarters section. "We ought to have charged that, but we were afraid it would look too bad, so we made it four hundred."

"You understand, of course," said the chairman, "that there is nobody to take our losses but ourselves; if we fix the price of potatoes below cost, we have to take it out of ourselves in something else."

In this manner Charlie dealt with the specific grievances, one after another. They had picked olives in a deal, and had planned to set up a mill back of the warehouse; but they learned that it was against the law within the city limits. They had worked for a lot of fruit in the orchards, and it had all come to ripeness at once, and they had found that they had not trucks enough to haul the workers to the orchards, and bring both workers and fruit back. They had hoped to get goat's milk for the children; but everybody knew the sad story, all the goats had turned out to be he-goats, and they had the devil's own time taking care of them. They made many such

mistakes because of inexperience, and the small scale on which they had to operate—hundreds of little jobs, each requiring special knowledge, and sometimes nobody had it.

The chairman explained a number of complicated deals, so that they might better understand the round table's problems. The building section was wrecking old houses, getting lumber, bricks, nails, hinges, plumbing materials, all of which they used in repair work which they traded for food. They had wrecked an old ship half-sunk in the bay, and got firewood and scrap iron. They had set up a little foundry back of the garage, and melted the iron and traded it to a dental supply concern—so they had got dental instruments for the medical section. They were tending the lawns of a chain of filling stations in exchange for gasoline; but unfortunately the grass did not grow as fast as the gas burned! There was complaint because they had traded food which was badly needed by the people, and Charlie explained this policy—unless they got enough food so that all could have a share, they used it in trades, for they had found that nothing made them all so bitter as to have some get food and others get left.

Sig Soren spoke, answering criticisms of their general policy. It was true they were starving themselves to get the tools of production, but they had to starve in any case, and the only question was, would they starve for ever, or would they some day get the tools?

"I grant you it's a shame that the poor are at the mercy of the masters of money; but it's so, and remains so, until we are able to get the means of production for ourselves. The businessmen can boycott us and break us, and so can the politicians, and so can the relief administrators. They say now they're going to put the unemployed at work; and will they use that power over jobs to build us or to break us? Here are our section co-ordinators on this platform, your leaders, without whose experience your ten months' work has been thrown away. All right; more than half of them are living on relief while they work for you. And suppose the relief people decide to take them to other jobs? Suppose they say: 'Your work is building a road or digging a ditch; take that, or you get no more grocery orders'—what then? Well, the Self-Help Exchange of San Sebastian might just as well close its doors. That's the danger you're in, and it's why we

can't go out and make demonstrations, as our radical friends beg us to do."

XII

"Are there any other questions you would like to ask me?" said the chairman. There were several, and he answered them. After that there was a pause. "It's getting late," he said, "and everybody is tired. There ought to be some decision taken."

He waited, but no one suggested anything. "I assume that those who have been expressing dissatisfaction must have a proposal. I want to say this, if you think I am wrong, and you want to put in somebody as chairman who has a different policy, there will be no hard feelings on my part, and I hope you won't hesitate to express your desires." He waited again. "Has anybody a candidate for chairman to replace me?"

The calling of this assembly had evidently taken the opposition by surprise, and they had not yet agreed upon a candidate. Perhaps Mrs. Pitter hoped that someone would nominate her, but no one did.

Charlie turned to the row of men and women sitting behind him. "Does anybody want to propose a substitute for any of our section co-ordinators?" And again silence. "Has anybody a motion to make?"

A man rose in the audience, an elderly man, stoop-shouldered and toil-worn—old Scotty Adams, the carpenter, whom everybody knew. "Mr. Chairman, I move that this general assembly pass a vote of confidence in our present administration."

"Second the motion," called several voices.

"Well!" said Charlie. "As chairman I have to put whatever is moved and seconded; but I'd like to say this—and I hope you will believe me—I didn't know this motion was to be made, and hadn't expected such an outcome of the meeting. Is there any discussion of the motion?"

Again a pause. "Vote!" cried a voice; and "Previous question!" cried another.

"Members of the co-operative, it has been moved and seconded that you pass a vote of confidence in your administration. I hope it is understood that only members are to vote—only those who have earned six hundred points or more per

week during the past two weeks. All in favour of the motion will please say aye."

There was a loud roar.

"Contrary-minded please say no."

There were scattered cries, in which you could distinguish the shrill tone of little Mrs. Pitter, and the high tenor of Ned Petticome, the irreconcilable.

"The ayes have it," said Charlie. "I thank you for myself, and on behalf of our co-ordinators. I hope that everyone will loyally accept the decision of this body, the final authority in our organization, and that we can all go to work to make a success of the policy we have ratified. Any further business? "

"Mr. Chairman," called a voice, "I move that we adjourn." And without waiting for a vote, everybody adjourned; and so ended the first attempt at revolution in the Self-Help Exchange of San Sebastian.

BOOK III: 1934

CHAPTER IX

WHITE SLAVE TRAFFIC

I

MAISIE TRENT was having a fuss with her mother. Maisie was walking up and down the room, tossing her little head, and shaking the wavy brown hair which she would have liked to cut off. Her mother was sitting in a chair by the fireside; she, too, was tossing her head, and it had wavy brown hair very much like Maisie's; she, too, had delicately chiselled features, and thin lips which she set in determination. She had kept her slenderness, and except that she had more lines, she looked very much like Maisie. That was the trouble between them, they were so much alike, and each wanted her own way.

They had had many fusses; it was an old story. "I know, I know!" Maisie was exclaiming. "I have everything a girl could desire—that is, if she happened to be exactly the sort of girl her mother desired, and if she desired everything that her mother desired her to desire. But it so happens that I desire something else; and I'm not going to meet any more middle-aged men!"

"He's not forty yet!" protested the harassed Mrs. Trent.

"We've argued about this till I'm sick of the sound of my own voice. I want to choose my friends; I want to be with the sort of people I like; I want to learn things—the things I'm interested in, and that my mother isn't interested in. You may recall that I once suggested going to college."

"You're still harping on that?"

"Did you suppose I would give up the idea? Stop and ask yourself—did you ever give up an idea? Are you any less determined that I am going to marry a man with money, with or without brains? I didn't want a debut party, but I had a debut party. I didn't want to receive visits from Mr. Milledge, but I received visits from him, and the only way I

could get rid of him was to talk to him about the things I was interested in, instead of about the things that he was interested in."

"So that's how you did it?"

"You can drag your daughter to the matrimonial trough, but you can't make her drink. I'm not going to be a nice wife and a pretty young mother, with baby prattle and cooking recipes and bridge scores in my head. I'm going to learn the things that my mother considers it unnecessary for a young girl to know, and I'm going through college, if I have to earn my own way."

"A fine chance you'll have, with ten or fifteen million people out of work."

"If I can't do anything else, I'll go on relief, like the rest of the unemployed. Maybe I won't find it so much fun as I've imagined, but I want to see for myself. I've been kept in cotton wool the very last day and night."

"So much thanks a mother gets for her love and devotion!"

"I know, mother, but if you would look at yourself in the mirror right now, you wouldn't see much love or devotion. You would see an angry face, set in hard lines. What your daughter has meant to you is something to dominate, to plan and to order, to say, go here or go there. What you haven't ever learned, and never will consider, is that every human being is something new, and that a girl wants to choose her own destiny."

Mrs. Trent bowed her proud head, and clasped her hands in despair. "I give up!" she exclaimed. "This new generation is too much for me!"

"Yes, mother, you say that, but it doesn't mean a thing, except just anger. If I were to say, all right, you give up, and I'm going over to the university and arrange to be coached and enter as soon as I can get something into my head but bridge parties and dresses—then right away the argument would begin all over again. Or if I should say that I want that nice young fellow Daly to come to see me——"

"A Socialist!" cried Mrs. Trent.

"There you are! All ready for an argument!"

"A free lover!"

"Maybe he's a free lover and maybe he isn't; I don't know and you don't. Maybe I want a free lover—how do I

know? I'd like to consider the difference between free love and slave love, and whether there is some happy medium. It's hard to find out, when your mother watches the books you get from the library, and rows with you over the titles, and insists on reading them first."

The thought of having a free lover for a daughter had brought Mrs. Trent to the stage of weeping; and Maisie cried angrily: "I know, mother; first tears, and if they don't work, the police."

"What do you mean, the police?"

"It sounds vulgar; but when I left home before, you told me I was under age, and threatened to have me brought back by force. You may have put it out of your memory, but believe me, I haven't. I have waited for the right day, and this is it. To-day I'm of legal age—I've looked it up in the library and made sure of it, and now the police with their clubs and their jails are on my side."

"Maisie, are you out of your mind?" Mrs. Trent had risen from her chair by the log fire, and was staring at her daughter through tear-streaming eyes.

"That's the thing to say, mother; your daughter has gone out of her mind. Your daughter has repudiated everything you believe in, and has thrown away her birthright for a mess of nothing at all. Say that, and everybody will sympathize with you."

The mother might have fainted, or she might have fallen on her knees and begged her erring child for mercy; but she was too much like her child for either course. She stood with hands clenched, crying: "Oh, you insulting, you unnatural creature!"

Maisie said: "Thank you, mother, that makes it easier. You have always preferred having your own way to having your daughter's love. So this is what I am going to do. I shall pack a few of my personal things into a suitcase, including one dress, a plain one—the old blue silk. I have ten dollars that Aunt Nellie gave me; I suppose I have a right to that. I'm going somewhere to earn my own living and find my own friends and think my own thoughts for one year. I don't want to make any unnecessary unhappiness, so I'll write you as soon as I get settled. All I want is to see how it feels to make my own decisions. Think it over, mother, and you ought to be able to understand—having my own way

means as much to me as having your own way means to you. I'd like to have your love too, but it's impossible—at least until I've proved to you that I'm grown up, and can take care of myself."

II

Maisie Trent was walking down the highway, on the left side, according to California law. The sun was shining, and always in California it is warm when the sun is shining, even in the month of February. Maisie carried her coat over one arm, and her suitcase with the other hand. She liked to walk, and she took deep breaths of the clean air, and looked at the fields with their fresh green and the first flowers, gifts of the rain, and at the blue mountains and white clouds in the distance. The suitcase was beginning to feel heavy, but she shifted it from one hand to the other, and her heart was high with adventure.

Cars passed her, one after another, on the broad highway. Those in the cars saw a slender, girlish figure in a brown dress, with wavy brown hair sticking out from under a knitted cap. The shortness of modern dresses enabled them to note that she had shapely legs; also they saw the weight of the suitcase dragging one shoulder down. One or both of these phenomena appealed to many drivers, and cars would slow up, and a voice would say: "Want a ride, miss?" Sometimes it would be "girlie."

"No, thanks," Maisie would answer; "I'm not going far."

The driver would note a musical voice, a smile, a slightly tip-tilted nose, a bright colour, and a general atmosphere that was pleasant. He would say: "No matter how near, riding's quicker than walking."

"I'm out for a walk," Maisie would reply.

It was always men who stopped, and she had made up her mind in advance that she would not get into any car with a man alone. If it was a woman driving, that would be different; but so far, no women had stopped, and Maisie hadn't yet got up the courage to raise her thumb. She walked; and the men did their best to make themselves agreeable. "No harm, miss, just trying to be helpful." Or else: "Come along, little one, it's a long way to Tipperary." Young ones or old, they desired the companionship of a young thing with a tip-tilted nose and a saucy, independent smile.

Maisie enjoyed the adventure of which she had been dreaming for a long time. "I'm out for exercise," she would say, and keep on; the men, timing their speed to her four miles an hour, would argue: "There's an awful lot of it ahead." She was on the left side of the road, and they perforce on the right, so the highway was between them; and at last they would give up and speed on. Maisie would follow the car with her eyes, a bit wistfully; for the friend she had in mind to visit was more than four hundred miles up this highway, and that would be some exercise indeed.

At last, after an hour or two, a car with a woman stopped. A fast car, with two men in the front seat, dark haired, looking like foreigners, but well dressed and well groomed; and in the rear seat, a woman, thirty-five or so, not too showy; lots of make-up, but then they all do it nowadays. "Want to ride, sister?" inquired the driver; and the woman smiled pleasantly.

"Thanks ever so much," said Maisie, thoroughly tired by now. She crossed the road, put in her suitcase, and climbed in beside the woman.

"Going far?" asked the driver, as he started up.

"A long way," said Maisie.

"Well, we're going to the end of the road."

"Indeed?" exclaimed the girl. "I'll buy the gas, if I may." She knew that etiquette required her to say this, and she tried to keep any reluctance out of her voice. Ten dollars would buy the gas for four hundred miles, but she wasn't sure how much it would leave for food.

"Forget it, sister," said the man. "Pleased to have company."

What did one talk about while hitchhiking? Maisie had an idea they would expect to know something about herself, and her reason for carrying a suitcase along a state highway. She did not want to say: "I can't get along with my mother, so I walked out on her." She said: "I'm going to see a friend. Also I'm hoping to find a job." That, at least, was a matter about which she must not be reticent.

"What do you work at?" asked the man beside the driver.

"I'm ashamed to say I've never worked, so far."

"Well, take my advice and don't tell that." The man laughed. "Take some line, and say you've worked at it all your life. Put up a bluff and try to act it."

"Thanks," said Maisie. "I suppose that's good advice."

"You darn well better suppose it," replied the other. "There's a lot of competition right now."

He had turned in his seat to talk to her. He appeared to be around twenty-five. His chin and cheeks looked as if he had just been to the barber, and there was a faint trace of sachet about him. His smile showed even white teeth, and his dark eyes were full of life. His figure was solid, but vigorous looking. The others called him Ben.

The one who was driving appeared slightly older. He was taller, and his voice deeper. He kept his eyes on the road and let the others do the talking; when he did speak, it was firmly, to settle matters. His name was Jake. Maisie wondered what was the relationship of the three. The woman appeared older than either of the men, and didn't seem to fit in as a wife; perhaps she was a sister. They called her Bess. "I'll have time to find out," thought Maisie.

III

The road was long and straight and monotonous; near-desert, but now the rains had brought it to life, and the first flowers of the year were making blue and yellow patches here and there. "Aren't they lovely?" remarked Maisie to the woman, not knowing quite how to start conversation.

"Yes, but they won't let you pick them," said Bess.

"They got to find something for the cops to do," added Ben; "so they set them out in the desert to watch the wild flowers." It was evident that he was one who was going to make the conversation.

The three of them had just been to Tijuana; they called it Tiajuana, as most Californians do, and doubtless believed that it meant "Aunt Jane." Ben said it was a "sink," but talked about it objectively. People wanted to gamble and watch horse races, and they weren't allowed to do it in California, so they went over the border, and the Mexicans got the money. Maisie, carefully brought up young lady, had never been there. She was interested to hear about the long bar where the thirsty Americans lined up, and about the old fellow from Iowa who had been seeing life, and had made a mistake with a traffic signal, and how much it had cost him to get out of Mexico. Maisie was confirmed in her idea that it was fun to be out in the world.

Presently they were talking about the depression. How could they help it, when every mile or so was a man plodding along with a bundle in his hand or a blanket roll on his back; when at every hot-dog stand and filling station were men and perhaps women raising their thumbs and asking to be taken to some spot other than the hopeless one on which they stood. "You see, sister," said Ben; "the competition I was telling you about."

"I'm very lucky," said Maisie, "and grateful to you three."

Ben talked about the unemployment situation, and the extremities to which men and women were driven. Some years back Maisie had read a magazine article about the "wild children" of Russia, and now she heard first-hand stories about her own country. A curious freak of history, that just as the Soviet Union had got rid of its "wild children," America should have acquired a larger number, and have no idea what to do about it. Ben apparently was not a social philosopher, just a curious spectator; hundreds of thousands of kids were running away from home, and terrible things were happening to them "on the road."

They talked about one thing and another, and the miles passed, and they got to be friends. They stopped in a small town for supper; you could get the fat of the land now for forty cents—and when the girl tried to pay for hers, Ben said, "Forget it, Maisie." He had asked her name, and thereafter called her "Maisie" instead of "sister." He had said, "Call me Ben—they all do." It was the custom of the road, she assumed.

They got into the car, the same as before, the two women riding in the back. "We drive all night," explained Ben. "Jake and I take turns sleeping; and you girls can sleep."

"I'm game," said Maisie. A rare stroke of luck, to make the whole four hundred miles in less than twenty-four hours!

IV

They climbed into mountain passes, and the lights of the car swept this way and that, picking out the slopes and the live-oaks on one side, and white-painted barrier posts on the other. Your ears began to crackle inside, from the altitude; but then

you came down again, and the road was straight through the valley, with fruit ranches which you could not see, except the lights in the houses. Bess lay back with her eyes shut, resting; and the passenger did the same.

But then an unexpected development. A small town, and they turned off the highway, and down a side street; then another turn, and they drew up before a residence. "Here you are, Bess," said Ben; and the woman sat up with a start. Ben stepped out of the car and shut the door behind him; he opened the door for Bess—she was on the right-hand side, and he took her suitcase, and set it on the kerb, and gave her a hand. "Good-bye, old girl," he said, "and good luck." Then he stepped in and took the seat beside Maisie, slamming the door. Jake started the car, and down the street they went.

This was the very thing that Maisie had resolved was never to happen; she was riding in a car with two strange men at night. To keep her promise to herself, she ought to have leaped out of the car the instant the other woman did. But she hadn't realized that Bess was getting out to stay; it wasn't until Ben said good-bye that she saw what was happening—and at that moment Ben was half-way back into the car, and the next moment it was moving. She had accepted hospitality from these men, and everything she had learned about courtesy made it harder for her to leap up and cry: "No! I won't ride with you alone!"

"Nice girl, Bess," said Ben, casually; he seemed to have no idea of any disturbance in Maisie's mind. "And an interesting place she's gone to."

"What is it?" asked the girl—wanting time to think.

"There's a Hindu lives there. Calls himself a swami, but I don't know if he is one, or what that means if he is. They say he's some sort of psychic, and can do all sorts of stunts. Wears a turban and a yellow robe, all that sort of thing."

Ben talked about Hindu "psychics," while the car swung back into the highway and beyond the limits of the town. Maisie, very anxious, but reluctant to reveal the fact, inquired, "What's Bess going there for?"

"He's a teacher."

"What does he teach?"

"He teaches the Hindu arts of love."

The words at first didn't register anything with Maisie. If Ben had said that the Hindu taught the arts of squaring the

circle, or the arts of pithing frogs, she would not have been more blank.

"They say he's a wizard at it," added the man; "and of course it's worth money to Bess."

They were out in a lonely country; and to make matters worse, it had begun to rain. The pelting sound on the roof and the streaming windows seemed to shut them in, and make the darkness absolute. Only out in front was there light, and the windshield wiper laboured back and forth to keep a bit of vision for the driver. "Glad you ain't out in that?" said Ben.

"Yes, indeed," agreed the girl, but in a feeble voice, and with a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach. "The Hindu arts of love!" and "It's worth money to Bess!"

"Listen, girly," said the man, suddenly. "I'm going to get you a job."

"Indeed?" said Maisie. She must make talk, and keep her voice steady.

"Yes, I got a lot of friends up in the city, and they're going to take care of you."

"What sort of job?"

"Oh, a fine one; good pay, easy work, and lots of company."

"What kind of work?"

"It depends on where you want to be. I know some high-class cafés in the city, and outside I know a couple of road-houses—you can take your choice."

Maisie made another effort at self-control. "I think," she said, "you are making a mistake. I wouldn't go into such places. I'm not that sort of girl."

"Listen, kid," said Ben. "You haven't any idea what sort of girl you are. You're nothing but a greenhorn, and don't know a thing about life."

"There are some things I don't want to know, and don't intend to know; so please don't talk to me any more about that sort of job."

"Listen, Maisie. You say you're looking for work; and you don't know how to do a thing. Well, you got just as much chance as a Chinaman. There's only one way a girl like you can earn a living, anywhere in the world. You got to learn that sooner or later—and why wear yourself out?"

"I said I wish you wouldn't talk to me any more about it."

"You got everything, kid. You got the looks, and you got the style—you got what they call 'it.' You don't have to be a common woman, you can go right to the top, you can have everything you want. Jake and I can give you the inside track——"

"Won't you please understand me?" cried Maisie, wildly. "I don't want to hear any more about it."

But Ben didn't seem to care what she wanted. He was a high-pressure salesman, and went on to portray to her the joys and charms of the job he was offering: money, clothes, jewels, the bright lights—even fame, and the world at her feet. Girls had gone on the stage, even to Hollywood, from the places to which he would take her. And the more he talked, the more fiercely Maisie cried: "Please! Please! Let me alone! I'm not interested!"

Until Jake, the driver, turned his head slightly, and said, out of the corner of his mouth: "Can the gab, Ben. Give it to her straight."

"Listen, kid," said Ben, promptly. "I'm trying to talk to you decent, but you won't have it. So now: it don't make any difference what you want. You're in our hands, and you're going to do what we tell you."

In all her sheltered life, Maisie Trent had never known the feeling that assailed her at that moment; a ghastly hollowness in the pit of her stomach, and all her world seemed to fall into the midst of it. Including her voice. She tried to ask a question, but could achieve only a faint whisper. "You mean—you would use force on me?"

"I'll tell you exactly what I mean. I've got a little hypodermic syringe in my pocket, and I give you a shot in the arm, and in about one minute you're sound asleep; when you wake up it's all over, and you got nothing to worry about—you're in a comfortable place, with people to take care of you and tell you exactly what to do; in about a week you're used to it, you find it's all natural, and not half as bad as you supposed. That's one way—see?"

Maisie saw, but she did not answer. She was shrunk as far back into the corner of the seat as possible, but that was not very far from the man.

"That's the easiest way for us, but it's not so nice for you. The other way is for you to be sensible, and make up your mind to listen to reason. I'm not a bad fellow, and I don't

want to hurt you, and you'll do a lot better to be friends with us. But get this clear right away—we're professionals, and we never make mistakes, we can't afford to. We know exactly what to do, and no girl has ever got away from us."

A dreadful cold terror had seized upon Maisie; her teeth were chattering, and her hands shaking uncontrollably. She knew the car was high up, in mountain country; she had seen the white barrier posts through the streaming windshield, and she thought: "The door of the car opens out, and I know where the handle is. If I turn it, it will fly back, and I can throw myself over the barrier, and he won't be quick enough to stop me. And they will go on—they won't want me if I fall over a cliff or down a mountainside." Two or three times she was tensed for this move, but strange as it might seem, what made her hesitate was the rain; it would be so unpleasant to lie there, wounded and broken, in the wet!

V

She delayed, and then it was too late. Perhaps Ben guessed what was in her mind; he moved over, and put his hands on her shoulders. "Listen, little one, be sensible now, and don't make me get ugly. I like you, and you'll get along so much better if you take life as you find it."

His face was close to hers, and she felt his breath. She made a frantic effort of the will, and restrained her impulse to struggle. It would be with her mind that she would save herself, if at all.

"Now, Ben," she said, "I've listened to you. If you mean to be decent, listen to me."

"All right, kiddo. What is it?"

"You've got hold of the wrong girl. I couldn't ever live the life you talk about. I'm too high-strung. I couldn't stand it."

"That's just the kind we want; you've got some pep."

"You don't get me at all. I've got a mind, and I have to use it. I was planning to go to college."

"Oho!" The man laughed. "Walking up the road with a suitcase, on your way to college!"

"You're making the worst kind of a mistake, Ben." While she was speaking, there came, in a sudden flash like sheet lightning in her mind, the idea which might save her. "You think because I was on foot, I'm a poor girl. But my

mother is rich and will pay you money. I'm sure it's money you want—you can get plenty of girls. I can pay you a lot more to let me go than you'd ever get out of my services in a roadhouse."

"Cut it out, kid," said Ben. "We weren't born yesterday." And Jake, turning his head, growled: "Look out, she'll be selling you a gold brick."

Maisie rushed on: "I know what you think! A poor friendless girl by the roadside! But open up my suitcase, and you'll find a gold-mounted manicure set. You'll find letters that will show you who I am. My uncle is Ridgley Curtis, one of the best-known corporation lawyers in California; do you imagine you can kidnap his niece, and hold her by force, and he not look into it?"

"Where you made your mistake was to go hitchhiking, kid, with all the limousines at your disposal."

"I had a row with my mother. I didn't tell you about it, because I didn't want to talk about my family. I packed up my things and walked out of her house, because I wanted to have my own way and go to college. I was going to stay with friends. Turn on the light and open up the suitcase and look. I can show you letters from rich people, you can tell by the stationery."

"Listen, dearie," said Ben; "all this is swell, and it would go good in Hollywood. But we're not in that line."

"I know about your line, and I'm trying to show you that you've got a girl who would never be of any use to you. You would think you had a maniac on your hands. I fought my mother for the last five years, to have my own way, and I'd fight you, or anybody else that tried to use force on me. I know what you think, you'd abuse me and terrify me, and I'd give up, as others have done. But I would never give up, and if there was no other way I'd kill myself, or I'd kill you."

"We've heard all that stuff a hundred times, baby——"

"Yes; but have you never heard of men in your world being shot, or stabbed, or poisoned? I couldn't fight you physically, but I've got brains, and I'd outwit you—you'd never have a moment's safety while I was alive. You can't conceive how I'd hate you; I'd do anything in this world to a man who used force on me. I'd heat a pan full of boiling grease and pour it into your ear while you lay asleep."

"Jesus, you've got an imagination!"

"I've got more than that, Ben. I've got the notion that I'm somebody special, and can't be treated like a slave. I've got a family and friends that would look for me, and back me with money and influence. Just put your mind on it, and see how simple it will be for me to land you in San Quentin. All I have to do is to find a way to get a letter mailed, from whatever prison or roadhouse you put me in. Just one letter with a three-cent stamp, to my mother, Mrs. Virginia Beverly Trent; or to my uncle, Ridgley T. Curtis, of Curtis, Marshall, Patterson & Higbie. The letter is delivered next morning, and five minutes later the machinery of the law is working to find me, wherever I am, and to find two procurers who go by the names of Ben and Jake, and drive a car which I can describe, and who left a woman named Bess at the house of a Hindu swami in a yellow robe, in a town of which I didn't get the name, but which I can come pretty near to locating on the map."

"Now listen, kid," interposed Ben.

"You said you'd listen to *me*," the girl rushed on; "and I assure you it's worth your while. Even if you give me that shot of dope, you won't be safe; for I promised my mother I'd send her a collect telegram, every night, wherever I was staying. She's wild with nervousness about me—I'm an only child, and she's a widow; if she doesn't get her wire to-night, she'll be calling up the police, or getting my uncle after them. They'll put my picture in the paper and offer a reward—and suppose the waitress or the cashier in the restaurant should recognize it—then the hunt would be on. Can't you realize, there are some people in the world who don't just sink without a trace?"

Maisie was talking as fast as she could find words. The mere act of listening was a weakening on their part. "I'm putting my cards on the table, Ben. I'm not begging for mercy, because you tell me you're professionals. I'm giving it to you straight. I'm telling you that if you go through with what you propose, you'll have to kill me—and what good will that do you? How much will the keeper of a roadhouse pay you for a pretty female corpse? On the other hand, if you rape me, I'll kill you, as sure as I'm left alive. I won't be satisfied just to send you to the pen. I'll get a gun and shoot you in the court-room, and see if the jury will believe the story I tell them."

"Say, we picked up a hot one, didn't we!"

"I've told you what to do—open up that suitcase, and make sure this is no Hollywood scenario. You can have the gold-mounted manicure set and the solid silver toilet set, and a couple of jewels that I brought along, just on chance that I mightn't find the world so easy to conquer."

"You've got us wrong, Maisie," said Ben. "We're not thieves, and nobody is going to find us with any stolen property on us."

"Well, now listen; I make you a fair proposition. You haven't done me any harm; maybe you've done me a service—you've taught me about life, a whole lot in a short time. Also, I owe you for some gas, so here's ten dollars. Let's call it square, and save all three of us a lot of grief in the future."

"Put up your money," growled Ben. "You still haven't got us at all." He was ready to argue some more; but Jake, the driver, turned his head—a man less in love with words, and also, perhaps, less in love with girls. "Can it, Ben," he ordered. "She's a false alarm."

Maisie turned to him. "Jake, you're a man of the world. All I'm asking is to be let out of this car, and I won't say a word to anybody about what has happened."

"Take it from me, darling," said the older man, out of the side of his mouth. "It don't do a girl any good to tell a story like this in the papers. Everybody is sure she lost her virginity, and half of them will grin and say she liked it."

"You're right, Jake. Also, it would drive my mother crazy, and I'd have to go back home and take punishment the rest of my life. So it's a bargain—my word of honour—I won't call up the police."

"What do you want, little one?"

"Just stop the car and let me out."

"In this rain?"

"I like the rain."

"Up in these mountains?"

"I love the mountains."

"You'll have a ten- or twenty-mile walk."

"I was walking when I met you."

"Just as soon leave you in a town, girlie."

"Thank you. I want to get out right here. At this spot." The car stopped, and Maisie opened the door upon which

her thoughts had been concentrated with suicidal intensity. She stepped out, close to the white-painted barrier on the edge of a cliff. Ben handed her the suitcase.

"Maisie," said he, "you're spoiling a record. You're the first girl I ever let get away from me."

"Thank you," replied the girl, as she took the suitcase, and stepped back into the darkness behind the car. Ben shut the door; the car started and was gone.

VI

Maisie Trent was walking on the highway again. But this time she took only a few steps—then a sudden fit seized her, and she stopped, and put down the suitcase, and lost the remains of that "fat of the land" for which Ben had paid forty cents. After this she was faint, and had to seize the barrier and hold on to it, in spite of pouring rain and puddles and mud. She began crying, and at the same time shivering—it was bitterly cold in this altitude, and the rain quickly soaked through her coat and dress. If Mrs. Virginia Beverly Trent had happened along at that moment, she would have had her way.

But no one came, and Maisie realized that she must walk again. The darkness was so black that she could hardly keep to the middle of the road. But her strength began to come back; she realized that the men were not likely to return, and if they did, she could hide from them. Darkness and rain and cold were nothing, as compared with the white slave traffic.

From time to time she noted a light on the mountainside—a wide band sweeping by. There was a car down the grade behind her. It took a long time to come, and this was convenient, because it kept showing Maisie the endless white ribbon in the centre of the highway. She shifted her suitcase and took new courage. After all, she was young, and her heart was sound, and rain is only water.

It was half an hour before the car overtook her. It was making a lot of noise, and she realized that it must be a heavily loaded truck. Its lights got bigger, and in the end became an illumination. Maisie thought it over, and when the truck was near, she moved over to the left shoulder of the road, where she could bolt into the darkness of the mountainside if necessary. No more men for her!

When the truck came even with her, it stopped. "Can I

help you, miss?" called a man's voice.

"No, thank you," replied Maisie. She wasn't sure if he could hear her on account of the engine, but her action would speak louder than words—she kept on walking.

"It's a long way ahead of you, miss," called the man; but she said no more. She was walking out into the lights of the truck, which gave the man every opportunity to watch her. But the dark mountain slope was near, and she was ready to drop her suitcase and bolt into its shelter.

The driver put his truck in gear, and resumed his toiling up the grade. However, after he had got thirty or forty feet past her, he stopped the engine; and Maisie stopped also. She had the advantage now, being in darkness.

"See here, miss," the man called. "It don't seem right to leave a young woman walkin' in the mountains a night like this."

"Please go on," replied Maisie. "I'm all right."

"Let me ask you, miss—has somebody been tryin' to do you harm?"

She hesitated; then answered, defiantly: "Yes, they have."

"I thought maybe so. I know there's terrible things happens to girls on the road. But please believe me, lady, I'm a decent workin' man, I got a wife and two babies at home, and I don't want to hurt no woman. I wish you please would let me take you to town—anyhow yoost to the next filling station—you got ten miles of these here grades ahead, and you might meet some feller that wasn't honest."

"He won't catch me," said Maisie.

"You better let me give you a lift, lady. I promise, I'll treat you like you was my sister. I'm yoost a Swedish workin' feller, drivin' a truck for the Self-Help Exchange of San Sebastian. A man has got to behave himself when he's got a truck on the road, he can't get drunk, and he can't hurt nobody—he's got his licence to think about. You ought to know that, lady. It ain't the same thing as these smart kids drivin' sports cars an' raisin' hell."

Maisie had never heard of the Self-Help Exchange of San Sebastian or any other place; but she had heard the reputation of truck drivers on the road, and she caught a note of sincerity in this voice calling through the rain. She began to waver in her mind.

"Please, miss," the driver went on, "I wish you'd do

what I ask. You can sit in this here seat alongside of me, and I swear there won't be no funny business. I won't even talk to you if you'd rather not. You won't owe me nothin'. I yoost can't bear to drive away and leave a woman in a lonesome place like this."

As soon as Maisie stopped walking, the cold seemed colder and the rain seemed wetter. Also, she knew that when the truck went on, the darkness would seem darker. Suddenly she capitulated. "All right, I'll trust you," she said, and came up to the truck, and handed her suitcase to the man, and climbed into the seat beside him.

"You been walkin' long?" he asked. "Here, I got a blanket."

"Don't you need it?"

"Me? No, I was settin' on it." He unfolded it, and waited while she got it wrapped around her—he was afraid to offer help, for fear that might seem the beginning of "funny business." It was a big thick blanket, probably made for a horse, and it was grand to get it around her wet shoulders and back and legs and feet. It was grand to be under shelter, and behind glass. The seat was not soft, like that in the other car, but it had a good honest smell of workingman's sweat, and Maisie settled back with inward sighs as the truck resumed its toiling up the grade.

VII

"Would you rather I didn't talk, miss?" asked the man, suddenly.

"No, certainly not," said Maisie. "I'm very grateful to you for your kindness."

"Somebody musta frightened you pretty bad, miss. I hope it wasn't too bad."

"No, not too bad," said the girl. "But it might have been." She was still shivering, and not entirely with cold.

"I reckon you don't want to talk about it, so I won't ask no questions. I'm sorry to be drivin' so slow, but I got a big tractor on here, and this old truck ain't what she used to be. Have to nurse her along the grades. Slow but steady."

"Just where are we?" asked Maisie.

"In the Santa Luisa Mountains, about twenty-five miles from San Sebastian. That's where we're goin'—that is, if it's all right with you, miss."

"That will do very well. Thank you very much." Maisie could not help smiling to herself. This nice young working-man was handling her as if she were made of tissue paper.

"My name is Ole Svenson," he volunteered, "and I'm drivin' for the co-op."

"My name is Trent," she answered. "And what is the co-op?"

"Don't you know about the co-ops? They got them in a lot of towns, I hear."

"What are they?"

"Well, a lot of us fellers can't get no more work, so we're makin' it for ourselves."

"How do you make it?"

"Well, we trade our labour for anything that people have got. It's what they call barter, instead of money."

"That's interesting," said Maisie. "Tell me more."

"Well, this tractor we yoost gettin'. There's a ranchman, and he grows beans, and he can't get no price for them, so he's got no gas to run a tractor, so he rents it to us on what we call points—that is, we work for him repairin' his barn."

"And what do you do with the tractor?"

"We rent land the same way, on points. Last year we planted about seventy acres and had every kind of green stuff. This year we expect to plant about two hundred. You see, we're up to nine hundred families now, and that takes a lot of food."

"I should think so," said Maisie. "It sounds like a grand thing."

"Well, Miss Trent, it's a lot better than settin' round waitin' for the depression to get over. We don't get all we need, but we get a little. And you meet a nice class of people—I mean friendly, and they treat you fair so long as you do your work, and you learn a lot you never heard of before. What does a feller like me, drivin' a truck all day and sometimes all night, ever get a chance to understand about the depression, and what makes it, and how co-operation ends it? They had these co-ops a long time in Sweden, but I was a baby when I left there. so I never learned about it."

"I'd like to know about it too," said Maisie. "Do you suppose they would let me go to work there?"

"What do you do, Miss Trent?"

"Oh, I can do several things." Maisie had learned more

than one lesson from Ben and Jake! "I can cook, and I can nurse——"

"The nurses is in the medical section," explained Ole. "They got quite a lot of 'em. They tell me it ain't so easy to find work for the women, they got a long waitin' list. But you can always go out an' do your own contact work—that is, you hunt up somebody that has got somethin' the co-op needs, and that will trade it for some work you can do; so then they take you in, and you got a job."

"That sounds like a real adventure," said Maisie Trent. The world was coming back to what it had seemed before she ran into the white slave traffic!

VIII

When the truck got down out of the mountains it made good time, and presently was approaching the city. "Where do you want to go, miss?" asked Ole.

"I don't know," said Maisie. "Have the people of the co-op any sort of lodgings?"

"No, miss, there's been talk about it, but we ain't had the money. Some of the men has fixed themselves up in an old stable, but the ladies yoost has to find a place."

"I suppose I'll go to an hotel. But I don't want an expensive one."

"I don't know much about hotels," said Ole, "but if me and the missus could put you up to-night, we'd be glad to do it."

"Oh, would you?" said Maisie. Trusting another man!

"We yoost got two rooms and it's a poor place. You see, we're on relief. But it's clean, and we could put you on a cot in one room, and maybe it would be better than goin' to a strange place to-night when you're all wet and maybe kinda scared like."

"Oh, thank you," said the girl. "That's exactly how I feel. I'm sure your wife is kind."

"She ain't much older than you, I reckon, miss, and she's kinda scared too. We got married yoost before I lost my job with the lumber company, or I guess we'd be waitin' yet."

Ole explained that his load, the tractor, had to be deposited on the land where it was to start hauling a plough in the morning. It wasn't allowed to travel on the highway, because

it had "lugs." He had to go to this place at once, since men were waiting on the ground to take the tractor off the truck, no simple operation.

"That's all right," said Maisie. "I'm warm in this blanket, and not a bit afraid of honest workingmen."

The place was a "subdivision" of real estate. Ole explained that the owners were in trouble because of the depression, and were trying to sell off part of the tract, and had rented the rest to the co-op in return for the painting of a lot of little signs, and also for the services of a couple of clerks. "That might be a chance for you, Miss Trent. Do you think you could sell lots?"

"Oh, mercy!" laughed Maisie. "What would I say?"

"Well, you yoost have to lie like sin."

"I suppose I could learn. I did an awful lot of it to-night."

"Did you, miss?" said Ole, and stopped—too polite to ask any more.

"I was in a car with two strange men up in those mountains; and I frightened them by telling them how rich my mother was, and about my uncle who was one of the most prominent corporation lawyers in California—my poor old Uncle Ridgley, who has lost everything he had in Wall Street, and is dying of a broken heart."

"Gee, Miss Trent, you was lucky to get out of that! I don't wonder you was scared of me."

"I'm not scared any more, Mr. Svenson. I'm interested in everything about the co-op. I do hope they'll let me stay and find out about them."

They came to the real estate subdivision; at least, Maisie was told it was that, but it didn't look very saleable in the darkness and rain. Some men were waiting in another truck, and they had timbers, which they fastened to the back of Ole's truck, and the tractor was eased down on to the ground. Then off went Ole and his passenger, this time to the garage of the co-op, where Ole explained there would be other men waiting for his truck; they would check the oil, gas, and water, and start right away getting a load of firewood. That was how they worked their precious machinery.

At the garage Maisie got out. "Keep the blanket on, miss," said Ole. "My place is yoost a couple blocks away, but you better keep warm."

It was a big, dimly lighted place with cars in it, and the Swede called to a man: "Oh, Sig!" Then he explained to Maisie: "This is Mr. Soren, our vice-chairman, and co-ordinator of our contact section."

Maisie had the vaguest idea of what these high-sounding titles might mean; but she looked at the man who came up—wide shoulders and a deep chest, his head seeming small in proportion; he had a kind face, and when he spoke, his voice was warm, and made you feel good. He was dressed in rough clothes, a leather jacket and waterproof hat, which made him look like a sailor, as indeed he had been. Maisie decided that she liked workingmen.

"Sig," said Ole, "this is Miss Trent. She was out in a car with a couple fellers that didn't treat her right, and left her in the Santa Luisa Mountains in the rain."

"Well, well!" said Sig. "I'm pleased to meet you, and glad we was able to help you."

Maisie was conscious that she presented a weird appearance, with her wrecked hat, and wet hair over her ears, and a horse blanket from her shoulders to the concrete floor of the garage. But Maisie had something that prevailed even over such handicaps, and she and Sig knew they were going to be friends. "I've been learning all about co-operation," she hastened to state, "and I'm hoping I can stay and do some of it."

"Fine!" said Sig. "We'll try to find a place for you."

"Miss Trent has promised to go home and spend the night with my family," said Ole, and added, timidly: "She's had a scare, Sig, and maybe it would help if you would yoost say I'm all right."

"I think I know Mr. Svenson by now," said Maisie.

"Ole is one of our best men, Miss Trent; and his wife is a dear little girl that everybody likes. You will be in safe hands for this night. Let me drive you around to the place."

IX

So there was Maisie Trent, who had left a pretty middle-class apartment that morning, taken into crowded lodgings for which the county was paying twelve dollars a month, in order that a workingman's family might not have to sleep under a bridge. Ole's little wife was asleep with her babies

in the bedroom, but Ole insisted on waking her, and she came out, a short and stoutish girl, with broad cheeks, and two long plaits of blond hair hanging down her back. She was greatly startled to have a strange young lady in a horse blanket introduced into her little nest; but she went right to work to build up the fire, and she put Ole in with the babies, and told Maisie to take off her wet things, and exclaimed over them, and hung them on a chair, and gave her a freshly washed flannel nightgown, dry and warm, and a coat to put over it. Then Ole was allowed to come back, and Maisie had a glass of hot milk, and, since there was a wife present, she felt free to tell her story. And what a story! The good and innocent Leeza Svenson listened with her big blue eyes wide open, and felt that all the movies she had ever seen in all her life had come true in her home.

As for Maisie Trent, she was learning the important lesson that in this world rough exteriors may conceal many virtues; as she had already learned that good tailoring and up-to-date manners may disguise the worst corruptions. She was tired enough to sleep on the humblest cot; and in the morning, there was a new world open to her fascinated eyes. A world in which everybody was poor, and all took it for granted; in which there were no middle-aged rich men considered to be "eligible," and whom you were obligated to entertain by pretending to be interested in the wholesale leather business, or the rise in "futures," or the decline in "rentals."

A world in which you could get very little, and were expected to pay for that little by rendering some service to others, and helping to build up a community. A world in which you were free to wear any old thing you had left, and it was taken for granted that you could do whatever you pleased—yet nobody pleased to do anything that was not decent and kind. Maisie had never heard of such a world before, and it was as though she had travelled to a far country, and had to ask questions about the behaviour of the inhabitants.

Of course life wasn't going to be all a holiday for a girl like Maisie in any group of people. She looked too gay and frivolous; she had too much of what Ben had called "it." The men came towards her as by a tropism; and naturally that awakened suspicions in the women, the wives and sweethearts who feared a rival, to say nothing, of the many middle-aged

and tired women who looked so drab in their dingy dresses, and would never have men running after them any more.

But the fact was that Maisie wasn't especially interested in the men; or anyhow she honestly thought she wasn't. She wanted to make friends with the women, and talk to them, and know about their lives. She wanted to get some work, so that she could stay in this interesting place, and understand the new ideas which made life seem so different, so much simpler, and less poisonous. Every year there are young people whose eyes come open to the realities of the bourgeois world. It has been glorified to them in fine phrases, such as "rugged individualism," but they discover that it is the nightmare of capitalism and war, and they grope about blindly for a way of escape, for something they can believe in, some way to exist without lying and cheating and destroying their fellow men and women.

So here was Maisie, with a ten-dollar bill, and a few things which she might pawn for perhaps that much again—that was her "grubstake," she had that long in which to make friends and find a way to secure her independence. Here she was talking to that nice Mr. Soren, telling him her problem:

"I have to be honest, Mr. Soren, and admit that I wouldn't be of much use in any sort of manual labour; I'm a spoiled darling. But I have had a little success now and then in getting people to like me; and what I thought was this: I might just sit around for a while, and listen, and see what you are doing and what you need; and then, if you wouldn't think I was too utterly nervy, and if you weren't afraid I'd disgrace you, I'd like to go out and see if I could help to get some things for you, and make some chances of work for myself. Would that sound too crazy?"

"Why, no," said Sig, "we have women in our contact section. There's places where a little feminine charm might help a lot."

"Those women know the work well, I suppose; and maybe they'd resent my butting in. I wouldn't ask any regular position, I'd just take a chance and see if I could produce something. I might get some ideas, listening at the round table—I've sort of got one or two already; if I could go out and make them work, that wouldn't do any harm, would it?"

"That's the way the co-op has been made," replied the nice Mr. Soren. "Go to it!"

CHAPTER X

LOVE AND DUTY

I

ON the blue Pacific Ocean the afternoon sun sparkled gaily. It was the same sun which shines at times on other oceans, but in tourist folders and real estate literature it is "California sunshine." In the month of April this California sunshine is used, not merely to ripen Valencia oranges and enlarge little green apricots, but to transform the backs and shapely limbs of California bathing beauties from an Aryan white to a Kanaka brown. Most California beaches have these beauties on display; the highways run along the land side of them, and the police are of the opinion that either the beauties or the highways should be moved, because of the great number of accidents which result from having the eyes of motorists drawn away from their proper business.

On this warm Sunday afternoon the beaches offered the usual banquet to the eyes; but at least one of the motorists was not partaking. He had been most of his life a preacher of the gospel, and had learned to withhold his attention from such spectacles; also, his wife was sitting beside him, ready to assist if it should be necessary. He had to make a speech that evening, and his mind was engaged in polishing his arguments while his car was rolling along at a safe pace of twenty miles per hour, close to the right-hand edge of the highway.

The vehicle was an ancient one, and of unusual design; about the size of a small moving van, but not so high, and having its only door at the driver's right, with a step that came down into place when the door was opened. There was a single seat for the driver at the steering-wheel; his wife sat beside him on a canvas chair, which she moved out of the way before the door was opened. Along one side of the van were two bunks, one above the other; along the opposite side was built a long table, one part of which held an oil stove, and was the kitchen; farther along it was the dining-room, and still farther the dressing-room, with a mirror above it. Under the bunks were a couple of suitcases, and many boxes

full of books, pamphlets, and leaflets. There were two little windows, covered with curtains, and the outside of the car was painted white, with signs and mottoes in large red and black letters.

The "housecar," as the couple called it, was rolling comfortably along, when suddenly the engine gave a slight cough, and died. "Oh, dear!" said the ex-preacher, mildly. "I fear the gas gauge has betrayed us again." He pressed the clutch pedal, so that the car rolled on of its own momentum. Not far ahead was a bathing place, with a hot-dog stand, an orange-juice stand, and other accessories, including a filling station. The husband and wife held their breaths. There was a slight incline, unfortunately the wrong way. Would they make it?

Slowly the speed of the car declined; but it was still moving. They pushed earnestly in their thoughts, and perhaps also prayed, and with this help the heavy vehicle just managed to reach the filling-station ground. Steered off the highway, it came to a stop without any brakes; and the driver and his assistant changed their prayers to thanksgiving.

The wife moved out of the way, and the husband got up, and selecting several samples of his "literature," descended from the car. He was a tall, thin man with sharp and prematurely wrinkled face, full of earnestness and zeal; he walked with a firm and decided step, and spoke as one who had carried a message all his life. In this manner he approached filling-station attendants when his housecar ran out of gas; and his wife waited patiently, having learned confidence in her husband's mission.

"Brother," the missionary began, "I am the Reverend Elias Prosser, and am campaigning for a new people's movement. You will see the motto on our housecar: 'End Poverty In California.' That is the slogan from which we derive our name, EPIC. Ours is really a crusade—to end poverty in our state by the method of putting all the unemployed at production for their own benefit. We are going out to the people, carrying this message. I have here our little campaign book, and wish you would be so kind as to look at it."

"I'm not interested in politics, mister," said the man, dully.

"This is much more than politics, brother; it is a discussion of the most important economic question now before the

people. It explains what causes the depression, and how it can be ended. As you will see, it is a booklet of sixty-four pages, closely printed, and you will find it most interesting reading. It sells for twenty cents, and surely every citizen of California can afford to pay that much to understand what is going on in our state."

The man took the book and glanced at it, but not as one who was used to handling books and devouring their contents. "I don't have much time for reading," he said.

"Many filling-station men are buying this book from me at fifteen copies for one dollar, and finding it easy to sell at twenty cents a copy."

"I don't think the company would let me sell no political stuff. We fellows have to do what we're told, you know."

"Yes, brother, that is what's wrong with America to-day. The workingpeople have done what they are told for a long time, and they haven't always been told what is good. At least it is your right to think your own thoughts; the boss can't stop that. Let me explain that I am on the road, speaking every night, taking up collections and selling literature to keep my wife and myself going. To-night I have a date in the George Washington School in San Sebastian, and have unfortunately run out of gas. If you would trade enough of my literature for gas to get me there, it would be a great help, and I am sure you would find it worth your while in the end."

"The gas ain't mine," said the man. "I have to account for what I sell."

"I know, brother. If I wasn't sure that what I'm offering you will repay you many times over, I would not be giving my time to this work. This is a people's movement, and we ask the people to help us, and at the same time help themselves. You must see that I look and speak like an honest man, and believe me, what I am offering you is worth the small price I am asking."

"Well," said the other, "cash is awful shy with us fellers, and whatever gas I give you, I got to ring up the price on the register. But I'll take one of the books and give you a gallon, to keep you goin'."

"Thank you," said the crusader. "I am sure that when you read this book, you will bless me for having come your way."

II

"I know," said Mabel Saugus. "But it looks as if it might become a mass movement; if it does, you won't be able to keep out of it."

"Well, I'll believe it when I see it," replied Jennie Gideon. "I've been watching for years, and I see these mushroom movements spring up—always they have some wonderful new programme, and always they're going to replace the Socialist party. But I see that the party lasts, and I stick by it."

"I know, Jennie, and I have stuck too. But I can't feel that we are making much headway."

"One reason is because so many people let themselves be lured off to try something else."

"Well, that might be the cause of our failure, and again it might be the effect; it's hard to be sure. There are lots of people who feel as I do; we work and work in the Socialist party, but we remain a little sect; we give the same bean suppers once a month for the same little group of comrades, and hold meetings and preach to the converted."

"At least we know what we believe," said Jennie. "We know that our programme must prevail, because it is fundamental, and based on scientific analysis."

"I know," answered Mabel, "and if all people were rational, it would be easy. But they have so many prejudices, and they get in ruts—maybe some new device is needed to pry them out."

So they argued, for hours at a time; so the Socialists were arguing all over the state. The leaders, who had the responsibility of keeping the party and a movement alive, were hostile, some of them bitter; but the rank and file were beginning to waver. There was a new wind blowing across the sea of California political thought, which for so long had lain in a calm. Many were spreading their sails to it, and getting into motion. Fathers argued with sons, and husbands with wives, for hours, and for weeks and months; homes were broken up and divorces were threatened over the issue. And not merely with Socialists, but with Communists and single taxers and progressives and liberals and even plain Democrats and Republicans—all were hearing about this new idea, and getting wrought up, either for or against it. "Speak EPIC and think

it, eat EPIC and drink it," ran one of the campaign chants.

"At least," said Mabel Saugus, "I think you ought to go to the meeting and hear what they have to say for themselves."

"Oh, of course, I'll do that," said Jennie—"at least, if it will make you happy. But I'm telling you in advance, nobody is going to get me into the Democratic party."

"You're open-minded," laughed Mabel, "but you'll bet a million you can't be convinced!"

They were sitting at Sunday night supper in the little breakfast-room of Mabel's home. That was one of the odd details of this odd ménage; when Mabel wanted to have her Socialist servant at the table with her, the meal was served in the breakfast-room. Jennie had decreed that the dining-room was reserved for company, and when there was company she was the servant. No matter who it might be, Socialist, Communist, or other sort of radical, no one could go out and say that Jennie Gideon was presuming upon her position, or using her party faith to get some worldly advantage.

But where it concerned Mabel's advantage—guiding Mabel's life, or setting her thinking straight—then Jennie did not mind presuming in the least. She was ten years older than her mistress, and much more sensible, so she declared; she had no trace of Mabel's tendency to melancholy, or to self-depreciation, and it was her role to scold her mistress, and drive her out into the world, and make her take hold of things.

"I asked Sig to come up to lunch to-morrow," said the mistress. "I think he's interested in this EPIC movement, and wants to talk about it."

"Oh, yes," said Jennie, "he wants to talk about the EPIC movement, and about the new accounting system, and the new relief administrator that's coming from Washington, and about the house-wrecking deal he made yesterday—all of those things!"

"Shouldn't he talk to me about those things?"

"You know perfectly well what I want him to talk to you about, Mabel. I want him to talk about *you*!"

"You big goose—and when you know he's a married man with several children!"

"I know he's not living with his wife, and I heard the other day that they've decided to separate, and she is taking steps to get a divorce."

"Well, a divorce takes quite a while, Jennie! Don't be in too much of a hurry."

"Yes, but a man don't wait to be looking around."

"How shall I get him to look at me? Hang out a sign: 'Eligible Spinster, With Money in Bank'?"

"You're much too good for any man, Mabel; but I don't suppose you want to die an old maid."

"The right men just don't see me, dear. I've given up long ago."

"A man like Sig would never ask you to marry him; he would be too proud."

"I can't imagine him pining away for my charms, Jennie. But I'll find out for you—twenty-one months from now."

"Why so long?"

"This is April, nineteen thirty-four, and in twenty-one months it will be leap-year, and you can fix Sig a fine dinner, with a bottle of wine, and after we have drunk it I'll sit in his lap!"

Said Jennie, primly: "My guess is that if you wait that long you'll find he has got him a new girl, and as co-ordinator of the contact section has arranged with some preacher to marry him on points."

III

The housecar came rolling into San Sebastian, in time for the Reverend Prosser and his wife to keep a supper engagement with those who had arranged for the meeting. At seven-thirty, in the auditorium of the George Washington public school, there were assembled some two hundred persons to hear about the ending of poverty in their state. They were the same kind of persons, and in many cases the same individuals, who had attended the "general assembly" of the Self-Help Exchange: Socialists, and all the forward-looking elements, who had heard about this new movement, and were trying to make up their minds about it. Among them were several members of the co-op; for Bill Mase of the contact section had already "gone EPIC," and had seen to it that a notice was posted on the bulletin board, and that all the mentally active ones were told about it.

The ex-clergyman had brought with him into the new movement the delivery and emotional equipment of the evangelist. The giving of work to the idle and of help to the

destitute had become a new method of saving souls, and he preached it to an audience which had the same background and point of view. Besides the programme of putting the unemployed at productive labour with land and capital to be furnished by the state, the EPICS demanded old-age and mothers' pensions, to be paid for by taxes upon various forms of unearned wealth. To the speaker each of these propositions was the substance of a separate crusade, and he presented them with old-time gospel fervour.

He explained how he and his wife had gone out on the road, and were being financed by donations. They were "taking neither scrip nor purse," because "the labourer is worthy of his hire." He told how they had run out of gas that afternoon, and had had to sell books at several filling stations in order to reach San Sebastian. Here in this school building, under the law, they could not sell literature, nor could they take up a collection; however, they could receive "voluntary dues," so it was proposed to organize that evening the first EPIC club of San Sebastian, and all were invited to join and pay their first month's dues, amounting to twenty cents, and each would receive a "free" book.

Then came the question period, and the preacher had to prove himself a well-grounded economist as well as political tactician. In that audience were men and women who had been thinking their own thoughts about such questions for many years, some for several decades. They wanted now to know exactly what they were invited to do, and what would be the consequences if they did it.

IV

Sig came to lunch next day, and afterwards he and Mabel sat in the sunshine on her loggia and talked about these matters for a couple of hours. The big fellow confided to his friend that he was thinking of resigning from the co-op, at least for a while, and giving his energies to building EPIC. For several months now he had not been feeling entirely happy in the Self-Help Exchange, because he was convinced that there was friction developing between him and Charlie Day.

"Don't misunderstand me," said he; "Charlie's the grandest fellow I know, and he's exactly the man for this job.

But I feel that he don't quite trust me. I can't blame him, because whenever there comes a new mess of trouble, they pick me as the one to take his place. I have always said no, but I suppose Charlie can't keep the thought out of his mind that some day I might say yes. This is his baby, you know—he was the one that called the first meeting."

"What makes you think he doesn't trust you, Sig?"

"Little things, that nobody but me would notice. If I make some success, Charlie is glad, but when there is some new commitment that I would naturally be the one to take, it is gave to somebody else. He just don't like for me to be too prominent. I have ideas, and maybe I have too many."

"Oh, dear!" said Mabel. "What a time people have learning to get along with each other! Don't you think it would help to talk it out with him?"

"It might help, and again it might make it worse. I don't think anybody could change the fact that he would be happier if I wasn't there. And it just so happens that I have a new interest—you know, Mabel, I began as a sailor, and I never stayed long in one port. I've been with the co-op now almost a year and a half."

"We'll miss you so much, Sig!"

"I'll stay in this city, at least for a while. I want to build up this EPIC movement, and San Sebastian is as good a place to start as any."

"You feel it's that important?"

"I've tried it on a lot of people, and it works. You see, I'm just as much interested in politics as I am in co-operation. And that's going to be one more difficulty between Charlie and me."

"Charlie is opposed to it?"

"I don't think he's opposed to EPIC, any more than to every sort of politics. He just can't trust any politician, and he can't see anything to be gained. He wants the co-op to stay out of it—and that's all right, it ought to stay out, as an organization. But its members won't stay out, they'll be EPICS to the last man and woman, as soon as they know what it's about."

"I saw that from their questions last night," said the woman. "Even Jennie had to admit it."

"Of course, we may not get it this year; but it's got to come, and it's all educational; the people will be that much

nearer to understanding the idea of production for use instead of for profit."

"Just what do you plan to do, Sig?"

"I'd like to start building the EPIC club here in this city. If it grows, as I think it will, we'll have a dozen before the primaries in August. If I become better known, I might travel over the state and speak."

Sig had taken a Christmas tree contract the previous winter, and made some money for himself, so he was a free man while it lasted. He would devote that money to the education of the voters of California, so he told his friend.

V

When Sig was ready to get into his car and go back to work, Jennie, the Socialist servant, emerged from the house with her hat on, and her handbag. "I have some shopping to do. Will you take me down with you, Sig?"

"Sure thing," said Sig.

"Do you mind, Mabel? I'll be back to get supper."

"That's quite all right," replied the Socialist mistress.

"If you want to stay later, I can get supper."

"Nothing doing," said the emphatic Jennie. "You'd forget all about it. I'll be here."

As soon as the man had started his car, and they were out of sight of the house, she said: "Look here, Sig Soren, I want to talk to you straight."

"All right, Jennie. What?"

"Did you just propose to Mabel?"

"Propose, Jennie?" Sig was bewildered. "Propose what?"

"You know what I mean, idiot. Did you propose marriage?"

"Why, Jennie! I never dreamed of it."

"Why didn't you dream of it?"

"But—what a question!" Poor Sig was so rattled, his car might have taken them both into the ditch.

"What do you dream about, anyhow? Nothing but business for the co-op? Here you've been coming for a year and a half to see the finest girl I know, and the finest you'll ever know if you live to have a long white beard. Yet you never dream of asking her to marry you!"

"But, Jennie—you take my breath away. I couldn't——"

"What is to prevent you?"

"Well, she's a rich woman, and I am—you know what I am. A poor bum."

"Then because she has money, she can't get a husband, is that it?"

"Why, no; but surely—she'll marry some man that has—well, someone——"

"She's got more money than she needs, so she has to marry some man that has still more. Is that your idea of common sense?"

"But I took it for granted she'd marry a man that lives like her. Surely some have asked her!"

"Oh, yes, some have asked her; some that I'd rather see her dead. But the men that really understand her ideas and that really are decent—they stand around and say she has too much money."

"But, Jennie, have you any reason to think that Mabel is the least bit interested in me in that way?"

"Of course you'd like to have me save you the trouble of having to find out! What I'm asking is, are you the least bit interested in Mabel in that way?"

"Well, I don't know, Jennie. I just never once thought of the idea. Of course, I agree that she's pretty near the finest woman I ever knew; and I've been grateful to her—I would do anything to oblige her——"

"Even marry her, hey?"

"Don't be so cross, Jennie. It's miserable to be without any money, as I was for a year. Mabel gave me all I had, and I'd feel like a scoundrel if I mixed up love with it."

"So then, this is the position of the woman who is generous—she gives her money to a man she might love, and so she loses what she most needs in life."

"Well, I certainly am surprised!" said Sig. "Honest, it takes my breath away."

"For a Socialist," snapped Jennie Gideon, "it seems to me you show a surprising respect for wealth. Mabel grew up on a ranch like you; she cleaned out the chicken coops and she slopped the pigs. Just because somebody found a lot of salt under her land don't mean that she's become a divinity."

"No, but it means she lives in a kind of house that I'd never saw the inside of in my life. If I was going to live in it, I'd have to practise wiping my shoes."

"Mabel and I would see to that for you. But that isn't really what's the matter—you're only fooling yourself, Sig Soren; you're not such a boob and you're not such a bumpkin. The truth is you're a man, and the fact that you could live a year and a half near a woman like Mabel and never once think that you might fall in love with her don't mean that you're so shy and so modest, it just means that you're like the other men, you don't want a woman to be honest and straightforward, you want one that coquettes and plays the devil with you; you want some golden-haired little floozie that cuddles up in your big strong arms—and picks your pockets at the same time."

"Gosh, Jennie, where did you get all that from? Here I've been for a year and a half living like an anchorite, and treating all the ladies in the co-op as if they was my sisters or my aunts."

"I know, but you'll find one of the floozies; she's waiting for you just around the corner."

"Well, all I know—I haven't saw her yet."

"You will. She's got her flags out."

"You're a woman, Jennie, and I have to take your word for a lot of things. I can only tell you I don't know what all this scolding means."

"That's why I'm scolding you. You make every woman wild with rage, with that silly little flapper making sheep's eyes at you all over the place, and you just playing her game."

"For the love of Mike, Jennie, tell me what you're driving at."

"Well, stop and think who has been in the co-op for a couple of months, and has managed to get every woman in the place wanting to pull her hair out."

"Are you talking about Maisie Trent? "

"Your powers of intuition are wonderful, Sig."

"You think Maisie is interested in me? "

"More and more wonderful! "

"Well, all I can say is, you've surprised me twice in one afternoon. I thought the first one was a knockout."

"Yes, I really believe you didn't know it. But you will—now that you're told! And probably I've done the very thing I didn't want to do—I've pushed you into her trap. This much I'll tell you in advance, if you walk into it, I'll decide you're just the same as all the other men—and how bad that is I won't bother to explain."

"I don't know what men have done to you, Jennie, and I won't try to defend them, because I've saw enough filth myself. But I think somebody ought to point out that Maisie Trent has went to work for the co-op and made good as fast as anybody that ever came in. She's only been here since February, but she's got it all in her head, and last week she went out and got a thousand subs to the *Morning Register*, delivered at the homes of our members, in return for our scrubbing floors and washing windows in the newspaper office, and doing their laundry."

"Is it really such an achievement to build up the capitalist press, Sig?"

"Our people have to read some paper—they can't get along on our little four-page weekly, with news about what's in the commissary and who is in charge of the new housewrecking job. I think those who judge Maisie Trent ought to remember that she can't help her looks."

"There goes the man!" said Jennie. "Let me tell you that a woman can help her looks a lot—and she does!"

"I know; but she can't help it that she's young and has a pretty face. All she can do is to go to work and stick at it and try to make good with what she has."

"And then all the men stick up for her, and those who criticize her are ugly old scolds! I know I'm not helping my cause any, but I'll tell you a story that old Dad Slemple tells. You know he knew Jack London when Jack was a youngster. Jack was a red-blooded he-man, he wanted to sail the seven seas, and live on raw meat, and wrestle with polar bears, and all that; a girl came along—just an ordinary high school girl in Oakland, but she heard Jack talking about his 'mate-woman,' and she saw what he wanted, so she began to jump over the chairs in the drawing-room; and that landed Jack, he knew he had met his true mate, and he married her; and after that she never jumped over another chair."

Said the big fellow, soberly: "I suppose that means you think Maisie is pretending to be interested in the co-op in order to please me. Is that it?"

"That's it. And if you marry her, she'll do no more hunting up of business deals, but settle right down and have a baby. That's all right—maybe that's what she's made for, and what you're made for; but I can't help fighting for Mabel, who is really interested in the co-op, and in the Socialist move-

ment—or perhaps now in this EPIC that you and she are going in for. That's what I have to tell you, and you can think it over and choose."

"My gosh!" said Sig Soren. "This certainly was one surprise party for me."

"Two surprise parties," said Jennie Gideon; "and they're on the same evening, so you can't attend both!"

VI

Mr. Prosser and his devoted little wife came to the "round table" late that afternoon, and the ex-preacher presented his cause and made formal request for the support of the co-op in the campaign that was getting under way. This was a grave problem, which kept the section co-ordinators until long after their dinner hour. They had already resolved to keep out of politics; but this was a different kind, and there were new arguments to be considered.

Charlie Day stated his position, as he had many times before. There was industrial action, and there was political action; both were necessary, but they were different, and ought to be taken by different and separate organizations. Neither ought to tie its fate to that of the other. "Our co-op may fail," said Charlie to Mr. Prosser, "and we ought not to drag your political movement with us. On the other hand, EPIC may fail, and it ought not to involve our effort to get tools and trade. We can get certain advantages if we are not tied to you, and you can get others if you are not tied to us."

They argued this back and forth; but the chairman was not to be moved from his position, and in the end his opinion appeared to be that of a majority of the round table. The Self-Help Exchange would take a benevolent attitude to the campaign, and its members would be free to help as they saw fit; but as an organization the co-op must say, and say truthfully, that it was not in politics, but only in the business of exchanging labour and products.

Sig thought this a good time to tell about his decision. He said that he was as enthusiastic as ever for their great adventure; but he thought they were now on their feet and could get along without any one individual. He was so much interested in EPIC, and in what it could do for the co-operative if successful, that he wanted to ask for six months leave of

absence, and spend the time organizing EPIC clubs. The section co-ordinators expressed their regrets, and the leave was granted with the best of feeling on both sides. Mr. Prosser and his wife were happy, and felt that they had done a good day's work.

Sig started work that same evening. Knowing the town eighteen months as a "contact man," he quickly found an EPIC sympathizer who owned an unrented store, and was willing to let the club have the free use of it. Having the names and addresses of women who were on relief, and unable to get work in the co-op, it did not take him long to find volunteer workers for the headquarters. With his own money he rented a telephone, and with this he called some of those who had handed in their names at the George Washington school, and asked them to lend tables and chairs. He sent off an order for a supply of EPIC literature on credit. He borrowed a mimeographing machine from the co-op, and got out a set of post-cards calling a meeting, and at this meeting he collected a few dollars, and persuaded everybody to pledge at least ten cents a week, and in some cases more. In short, by one device or another he got the EPIC movement started in San Sebastian, as it was being started in a hundred other cities and towns of California.

VII

All this while Sig was wrestling in his soul with one of the most delicate of problems. Two lovely ladies offered for his inspection—and which was he going to choose? As Jennie phrased it, two parties on the same evening—and which would he attend?

He considered Mabel Saugus. Yes, surely, she was the truest and kindest and most generous of women; his heart warmed every time he thought about her qualities. He had never thought about loving her; but now he was invited to think, and he did so, and discovered that his feeling about her had a strong fraternal quality. Suppose, for example, he should offer to kiss her; he was embarrassed at the idea, and the kiss would be a profoundly respectful one. In fact, he wasn't just sure how he could lead up to such a proposition.

There was that devilish matter of her money. Sig was no saint in a church window, but a man who had had a hard struggle all his life to earn a living; the thought of having com-

fort and freedom for the rest of his days was not lightly to be put aside. Just now his oldest boy, who was in high school, had written timidly about his need of a sweater. In the big stores in the shopping district were beautiful sweaters on display, and how wonderful it would be to walk in and order a sweater sent by express to that fine, hard-working lad. If he married Mabel he would be able to do things like that; she would expect it. She would expect him to have something to say about causes to which she gave her money, and so he would be effective on a larger scale.

But in the midst of these thoughts, Sig would fly into a rage with himself. He was descending to the level of a common fortune hunter; turning the tender sentiments of a fine-souled woman into sweaters and good dinners and a new car—yes, Sig urgently needed a car, and that base thought crossed his mind. Obviously, this would destroy his self-respect! Mabel Saugus as sweetheart and wife was not to be thought of, and he would forget the subject.

But that didn't settle the matter; for he would hear Jennie Gideon jeering at him. "Oh, yes, you're a noble fellow! You don't want to marry Mabel, and you'll give yourself fine virtuous excuses for not loving the woman you really ought to love!" Sig would start all over again, and consider whether it was his duty to love Mabel, and whether or not he was using her money as a pretext, to get out of doing what he really didn't want to do!

Then would come the turn of Maisie Trent; and here he soon discovered a difference in his feelings. The idea that Maisie Trent might be interested in him caused a warm stirring in his heart; all the way to the tips of his fingers and his toes there ran a kind of tingling—strange, unexpected, a little frightening, in view of Jennie's threat to decide that he was no better than all the rest of the men! Sig realized that he wouldn't have the least difficulty in bringing himself to kiss Maisie Trent.

So began another moral struggle. Was it disgraceful for him to feel that way? After all, what was wrong with Maisie? She was young and gay—but everybody had a right to be that, once in a lifetime. Sig, until recently co-ordinator of the contact section, needed nobody to tell him that Maisie had worked loyally. But what about the idea that she was doing it just on his account? Well, it was a subtle form of flattery.

Was she really interested in him? Or had Jennie imagined it? If it was true, he had to make up his mind quickly. It would be embarrassing as the devil; because for a whole year he had existed on Mabel's bounty, and he couldn't keep feeling under obligations to her. Or could he? After all, Mabel hadn't been buying love, she had been helping a work in which neither he nor she sought personal gain. He had done that work as hard as he could and was still doing it—or was he? Just now he was in a turmoil over problems of love, when he ought to have his mind on schemes to teach people how to end poverty in California!

Sig Soren could have appreciated the plight of the old-time English poet—how happy could he be with either, were t'other dear charmer away! Like poets and many other men, he resolved that he would have no more to do with the wretched problem. He would invite all three of the mind disturbers, Mabel and Jennie and Maisie, to the first meeting of the EPIC club, and would treat them with equal brotherhood and sisterhood, discussing problems of political organization on the basis of their being serious and sensible persons like himself.

But right in the middle of the meeting, while Sig, as chairman, needed all his wits about him, his eye happened to light upon Mabel Saugus, and to note that she was looking at Maisie Trent. The idea smote him: "Is she thinking about all this?" And of course that started him thinking. Had Jennie talked with Mabel about it? If so, it was truly a miserable thing, because Mabel would expect him to give some signs of being more than polite. But Jennie hadn't told him whether Mabel knew. She probably would never tell him. Confound her!

A little later Sig observed Maisie Trent looking at him. It was natural for people at a meeting to be looking at the chairman; but all the same, Sig began to experience that strange tingling in his spine again. Could it be that Maisie was interested in him? Or was it all just a mare's nest of Jennie's? How the deuce——

"Mr. Chairman, I rise to a point of order!" A shrill female voice brought Sig to with a start. It was Mrs. Jane Pitter, the little woman who had started the row in the co-op, and now was joining the EPIC club, so as to stir up rows in that! Sig had noted her brother, Jake Burrige, in the audience, pale after six months in the county jail for having

led the unemployed in a raid on relief headquarters. Sig foresaw that in the next week or two Mrs. Pitter would make a motion that the EPIC Club of San Sebastian should endorse the programme of the "united front" with the Communists; her brother Jake would second the motion, and each of them would make a long speech on the subject of the imminent danger of Fascism in California, and the need of rallying all the forces of the workers against it.

"I said 'Point of order,' Mr. Chairman!" Sig knew that Mrs. Pitter sat up nights studying Robert's *Rules of Order*, so that she might be in position to make disorder by crying, "Point of order!" This time Sig hadn't the remotest idea what he had done, or what anybody else had done. He thought, in a panic: "I ought to quit, and let them put in somebody that isn't distracted with this infernal sex problem!"

VIII

Just around the corner from the Verdugo Street centre the co-op had secured on points a vacant store, and with infinite labour had equipped it as a restaurant. It was an unusual sort of eating place, with the menu card in two sections; on the upper half were prices of things in cash, and on the lower half were prices in part cash and part points. The general public used the upper half, and members of the co-op used the lower. There were no foods listed for points alone, because the month of April was a lean one—the winter supplies were exhausted, and only the earliest garden truck was out of the ground.

The "Grubshop," as it was popularly called, was near the EPIC headquarters, so Sig generally had his lunch there. He was still a member of the exchange, and everybody's friend; when he was going somewhere in his old car, he would give someone a lift to a place of work, even though it was out of his own way. Maisie Trent had no car, and had to do her work for the women's contact section by walking or riding in street cars; it had happened now and then that Sig would ask where she was going, and offer to drop her at some convenient corner. Was he going to discontinue this friendly practice, just because Jennie Gideon had taken up the notion that Maisie was in love with him?

The girl had to go out into the country several miles into

one of the canyons, where an old woman had a ranch with a cellar reputed to be packed solid with jars of honey and boxes of dried fruit. The members of the co-op, living mostly on beans and split peas and rice and potatoes furnished by the relief people, craved those goodies, and offered to come and give the old lady's ranch the sort of manicuring it had needed ever since her husband died. But the old lady was suspicious, and afraid to trust this new-fangled co-operation business.

The contact man reported that she was talkative, and Maisie had taken the commitment to sit and listen to her, and try to win her confidence. Sig suddenly remembered that he, too, had a prospect in that neighbourhood, a man who had promised a contribution to EPIC, and might make it bigger if Sig called and told him the details of how his money would be spent. So there were Sig and Maisie taking a drive, on a perfectly lovely spring afternoon among California's foot-hills carpeted golden with poppies and little sun cups; pink and blue with gillias and wild lilacs; and purple and white with mariposa lilies. Maisie was so happy, so young and full of eagerness, she was a spring-time all by herself.

She was telling him about her great good fortune; she had written her mother a letter about the wonders of this new life she had discovered, helping to build a new society within the shell of the old. There was only one trouble—Maisie wasn't getting quite enough to eat. She would continue to go hungry, rather than give up her job in the women's contact section; but if her mother still loved her, she might prove it by sending twenty-five dollars a month—no more than that, because that was what persons on relief were getting, and Maisie wouldn't be any richer than those with whom she was discovering this new life.

"I didn't really think she'd give way," said the girl; "but I have her cheque, so my problem is solved, and I can give all my time to the co-op."

"Can you really get along on that?" asked the man.

"Believe you me!" said Maisie, in the weird language of the young people. She was living in lodgings with three other women, and her share was seventy-five cents a week. When they ate in the Grubshop it was part points, and for other meals they clubbed together and cooked on an oil stove. "It won't be so easy when my clothes begin to wear out; but it'll

be better in one way—because women don't feel you're really one of them while you're better dressed than they are. This is my old blue silk, but it's prettier than the others have."

"You really are interested in this job, aren't you!" observed the other.

"Interested?" echoed the girl. "Gee, Sig, I never had such a time in my life! You see, I didn't know what was the matter with me; I thought I must be crazy, because I couldn't be happy with any of the people I met."

Sig believed all this and was pleased by it; but of course, in the back of his mind, he could hear Jennie Gideon jeering. "Idiot! Imagine your finding out anything about a woman, except what she wants you to know!"

IX

The EPIC organizer was really in great danger that sunshiny April afternoon, as any woman could have told him. But the first he knew of it was when it rose up and hit him between the eyes. "Tell me," said the girl. "Are you going to marry that nice Mabel Saugus?"

"Gosh, Maisie!" said he, taken aback.

"Everybody thinks you are, Sig."

"Oh, do they?" The nerve of them gossiping about his affairs! "Well, you know, I've got a wife."

"But they say she's getting a divorce."

Yes, they were watching him! Everybody watching! "That takes some time, Maisie." He was playing for time himself.

"I know; but a man can be making up his mind." The very thing that Jennie had said to Mabel, though of course Sig didn't know that. "Everybody thinks Mabel Saugus is such a fine woman; they hope you will marry her."

"Do they, really?" Not only watching him, but taking charge of his affairs! All the women telling him what to do! And so benevolent and unselfish! "Why the dickens can't they let me alone?" he thought.

Aloud he said: "It would be hard for a man in my position to think of marrying a woman as rich as Mabel."

"You're one of the few men who could stand it. You'd know what to do with money."

"We all think we'd know what to do. But the idea scares

the wits out of me." Then he thought: "There now! I've told her I've been thinking about it. The gossip will be all over the place."

Perhaps Maisie was reading his thoughts. "I won't talk about it, Sig. I'm not a chatterbox. I just wanted to know how you felt about her. I have a reason."

"Jiminy crickets!" thought the man. It was getting worse and worse! He began to get into another panic. Was the girl going to propose to him? And if she did, how was he to get out of it? Even while he planned escape, that strange feeling began to run up and down his spine again.

"You know," continued Maisie, "I've known people who had a lot of money; and they're just as apt to be lonely and unhappy as anybody else. The money doesn't make much difference."

"You think it's that way with Mabel?"

"I hardly know her at all; but she looks like that. And of course, you're one man in a million, so far as she is concerned."

"How do you get that, Maisie?"

"You're one she could marry who wouldn't be thinking about her money; who really understands her ideas. and would go on believing in them, rich or poor."

"You think I ought to marry her, then?" Sig couldn't keep from asking the question, just out of curiosity.

"It depends on whether you love her or not. A man can't marry from a sense of duty; at least I wouldn't think he could. I've never been married, so I'm just guessing. But it seems to me there would have to be love to start with."

"Yes, but what is love? It takes many different forms, and you can't always feel sure."

"No, that's not true. I know that much! If it really is love, you know it right away, and you can't help but know."

Certainly a most dangerous subject to be discussing with a young woman! Yet it was the subject that Sig most wanted to discuss. His mind and heart were full of it. It was a temptation—just to talk, nothing more.

"I'm very much puzzled in my own mind, Maisie," he admitted. "I can't feel that I have a right to think of marrying again, when I haven't any means of support."

"But that is up to the woman, surely. So long as she knows what you have, or what you haven't."

"It seems like I would be using love to get something."

"You have to know what is in your own heart. If you know and the woman knows, that's all there is to it."

"Yes, that sounds fine; but who really knows his own heart? Temptations are there, and it's so easy to make up formulas and pretences for doing what we want to do. It's hell to be without money—you're just playing at it, Maisie, but I've had it most of my forty-five years, and I tell you sometimes it's pretty near knocked me out."

X

Now so far this had been a decorous and proper conversation—at least it seemed so on the surface. Maisie apparently wanted to give a man advice; and the man apparently needed it. But all the time, as he talked, his mind was divided into several parts: one listening to conversation, one watching the mountain road and steering the car—and a third remembering the poisonous suggestions of Jennie Gideon! Was he really finding out anything about this gay young thing with the bright cheeks and tip-tilted nose? Or was he just watching her jumping over chairs?

Anything was possible in this strange world of sex. Deep down in the natures of men and women strong impulses were driving; dark and blind and ruthless, not knowing our moral codes, not consenting to them! Reason did its best to handle them, but could not always be sure of its authority, or of its staying qualities in such a conflict. Reason got tired and had to rest, but desire worked day and night.

"Listen, Sig," said the girl, suddenly. "I'm trying not to fool myself—nor you either. The reason I'm asking about Mabel and how you feel towards her—if you love her, and that's your happiness, I'll wish you all the luck in the world, and I'll surely never get in her way. But if you don't love her, that's important to me, because I want to put in my claim."

Gosh amightly, there it was! The second time that Sig's driving had been endangered by the sex problem! A man needed a steady hand and an attentive eye on these mountain grades. He couldn't even look at the kid!

"Maisie," he said, his voice low and uncertain, "do you really feel that way about me?"

"I do, and it's one of the times when there isn't any mistake. Is it shocking of me to say so?"

"Of course not. I was a feminist—I guess before you was born, Maisie. That's one of the troubles, I'm old enough to be your father."

"I know. It was a risk I couldn't help running. But it didn't happen."

Ordinarily Sig wasn't dumb about other people's wit. But his mind was in a state of agitation just then. Maisie perhaps guessed it, for she went on to state: "You are not my father; and you have told me your exact age; so your duty is done. I can decide whether I want a man that old."

"You think you do?"

"Shall I tell you what I want?"

"Of course."

"Well, I want a man that looks like you—that is big and strong and capable. I want one that talks like you—that has a nice, warm, friendly voice, that sort of says 'Come on' without intending it. I want a man that knows just what you know; one that is interested in what you're interested in—exactly those things and nothing else."

"How long have you known that, Maisie?"

"I began to know it the first night in the garage."

"You was frightened, and wanted somebody that suggested protection. But you're not in danger now."

"A woman is always in danger—of losing the man she wants. She has to use her wits to get him and keep him."

They had come to the top of the grade, and there was a level place where cars could stop, and turn if they wanted to. There was a view of forest-clad hills, and people got out to admire it. Sig stopped, not on account of the view, but because it was dangerous for a man to drive a car when he didn't have his mind on it. He sat, staring straight ahead, but not seeing the hills.

"This is a sort of a problem for me, Maisie," he said, in a near whisper.

"Why?"

"Do you want me to tell you how *I* feel?"

"That's what I asked for."

"Well, when a fellow's young, and he meets the right girl, or thinks he does, he's all thrills and shivers, and he dreams all sorts of wonderful things, and he'll fight the world for that

girl, and go to the ends of the earth for her—I did, pretty near. Then he marries, and they have children, and a lot of troubles; they grow, and change—they become different, both of them, and gradually they find they can't agree about anything, and they're spending their time quarrelling. And that's no good."

"Why go into that?" said Maisie.

"The dream dies, and the man says, that's the end of that, and turns his thoughts to other matters. Then, if he finds he's starting all over again, he remembers the saying, there's no fool like an old fool."

Maisie waited. "Go on," she said.

"But that's all."

"But what has that to do with it? The point is, whether the man cares for the new girl."

Sig put his hand on hers. That was better than words; speaking gently, quietly, to the heart. He looked at her—for the first time since this intimate talk had begun. He saw that her lips were trembling, and he thought he saw a teardrop on her cheeks. "Dear!" he said. She leaned against him, and he put one arm around her. That much was permitted to couples sitting in parked cars, while other people were looking at the scenery.

"Tell me the God's truth, Sig," she whispered. "Do you really care for me, or are you just being kind to a poor kid?"

"I oughtn't to, Maisie," he replied; "but it seems that I do."

"Oh, stop being afraid of life!" she exclaimed. "If you really love me, I can make you happy; and you'll make me the gladdest woman in California."

The strange, disturbing feeling had taken possession of Sig Soren, and he was dreaming the dream of his youth all over again. Maisie was saying: "I've been so scared. I thought you loved Mabel Saugus, and I thought you ought to love her, and it was going to break my heart. Why didn't you love her, Sig?" Then, before he could speak: "No, let's not talk about her. It's too sad! Make me happy, Sig! Tell me I'm the right one! Tell me I've got something that you want!"

"You've got so much I'm afraid to take it, Maisie. But if you offer it, I suppose that lets me out!" He held her hand—as tightly as he dared, with his excess of strength.

They sat there, settling the problem of their future. The longer they talked, the more certain Sig became that she was

the right one, and the less he cared what anybody else might think about it, now or ever. To the devil with Jennie and her jeers!

Suddenly the girl said: "Oh, gee, we're neglecting our duty! I'm supposed to talk to that old lady, and bring back a report to the round table."

And Sig was supposed to be raising funds to end poverty in California! The sex problem was balling things up as usual!

"Take me to the ranch," said Maisie, "and I'll do what I can, and phone in my report. Then we'll be free to think about ourselves."

He assented, and was about to start the car. With one of those crazy impulses which now and then assail the most carefully brought up young women, Maisie flung her arms about him and pressed a kiss upon his lips. "That's just so you'll know it's really love," she said. She drew back and looked at him, while he blinked and made a queer face.

"Gosh, Maisie! That makes me dizzy."

"Wait a bit," she said. "Don't start the car yet."

XI

Maisie forbade Sig to tell anybody what had happened. She took a day to think it over, and then went to Mabel's home. She wasn't going to trust this job to any third person! Sitting in the drawing-room with decorations by S. Eisenberg's Department Store, she said:

"Mabel, something has happened that I want you to know about, and I want to be the one to tell you. Sig and I are going to be married."

Mabel gave a start, and exclaimed: "Oh, Maisie! I am delighted to hear it. I am sure you are just the one to make him happy."

"Do you really think so, Mabel?"

"Of course I think so. You have everything that he needs."

"I have been wretched about it, Mabel, because I thought you cared for him."

"I do care for him, of course; he is one of the dearest men I have ever known."

"I know. But I was afraid maybe you were in love with him yourself."

Mabel laughed. "Well, I might have been, Maisie, if he had been in love with me. I have known him about a year and a half, and he has been brotherly in his attitude to me, so naturally I was sisterly in my attitude to him."

Maisie was gazing at her. "You are so reserved about yourself, Mabel. I never knew what to think."

"Maybe I am too reserved, Maisie. Maybe that's why the men all take a brotherly attitude to me. Jennie is always fussing at me about it."

"Well," exclaimed the other, "I feel just as Jennie does. Sig ought to have been in love with you!"

"I am too positive, and too outspoken, I suspect. If a man falls in love with me, it will have to be one with a little touch of weakness in his nature—one who wants to be protected."

"Oh," cried Maisie, "I hope the right man comes into your life."

"All my friends are hunting for him!" It seemed to amuse Mabel, but somehow Maisie doubted if her laughter was altogether genuine.

CHAPTER XI

RELIEF

I

THE old Albany Post Road which runs up along the Hudson River, has now become a wide motor highway; but there are still places where it makes a turn to avoid Farmer Jones's barn, or swerves where Farmer Brown's calf jumped out of the way of a rattlesnake in the year 1687. It still makes long detours back from the river where some proprietor had influence with the selectmen to prevent the cutting through of his farm; and many of these farms are still in the hands of old families who have turned them into private parks, and have indicated their indifference to human fellowship by surrounding them with ten- and twelve-foot fences, containing steel enough to build a battleship.

An hour or so's drive from New York is the Alding estate, so exclusive that even the porter's lodge is hidden from the highway—you drive in between two lines of fences before you come to the entrance gates. If you are one who has a right to enter, you do not have to toot your horn; you take an electric torch from the pocket of your car, and direct the rays upon a certain spot at the side of the gates, and promptly they swing back, and wait a proper time for you to come through, and then shut and lock themselves again.

Gadgets like that are one of the delights of J. Seymour Alding, and when he puts on his woollen nightcap and gets into his fancy Louis-Seize bed on a cold winter night he snuggles under the down quilts and presses a button, and at once the bed begins to move, and it rolls on to the sleeping-porch, and the doors close behind it. In the morning he presses another button and the process is reversed, and the old gentleman puts his pink toes out into fur slippers warmed by a plate under the Persian rug. What's the use of living in modern civilization if you don't get the benefit of it? asks the president of the International Insurance Company.

Herbert Alding, youngest son of the president, had the secret of the gates, and his car rolled in and swept up the long driveway to the knoll on which stood the mansion. It was a warm summer evening, and a breeze was blowing off the river, and the dancing lights of the fireflies rivalled the stars in the sky and the illumination along the far shore of the river. Herbert left his sport car under the porte-cochère, and let himself in with a key.

The Alding home was old, and had been decorated a long time ago, and not according to modern taste. It had a great deal of furniture, and this furniture had come from various parts of the world, and cost much money, but few pieces matched. It was the same with rugs, hangings, pictures, and other things to be looked at. Wherever there was a level surface on a piece of furniture, there was a Hindu or Chinese or Mexican vase, and that vase was an excuse for the display of the Alding orchids.

J. Seymour Alding had acres of greenhouses, and sent exploring expeditions into the forests of the Amazon and the Orinoco, and his home was a museum of living jewels out of these lands of death and torment. He himself was a devout Presbyterian, living a God-fearing and rather drab life—save

for this odd form of dissipation, the cultivation of plant parasites of strange and startling colours, white as the arctic snows, or black as African ebony, or splotted with gold from the sun, or purple from the ocean's bed, or scarlet from the fresh blood of battlefields. Every day the head gardener came with baskets of these flowers, and took away those which had passed the climax of their splendour.

II

When you have been brought up among orchids, you don't see them; so Herbert walked straight to his father's study, where the old gentleman was waiting for him, reading a magazine article by one of his explorers. He was well on in years, and rather pudgy, with a round reddish face having a wide mouth drawn tight across it. When J. Seymour talked he opened only the middle half of his mouth, producing an odd impression of tightness and reserve. He had an abundance of grey hair, but this, unfortunately, had been raised on some other man's head.

"Well, son?" said he.

"How's mother?" asked the younger.

"She's holding her own, the doctors say. How are you?"

"Fine, father."

"You look a little peaked."

"Well, I've been working pretty hard."

The old man studied his son's face, in the soft light from the ceiling of the study. The youngster was pale, and had more lines than anyone should have shown at twenty-eight. "A good boy, but a nut," was the father's thought. "Such a pity!" Herbie was the only one who was afflicted that way. All the other four were normal young businessmen, untroubled with ideas; they played golf, raised good horses, and rode them, and otherwise diverted their minds in sensible ways, so that they had rosy cheeks and well-filled-out bodies like their sire's.

"Father," said Herbert, "I came to let you know that I've decided to take a job with the Federal relief people."

"Oh, dear me!" said the old gentleman; as a pillar of the church, he endeavoured to restrict his vocabulary.

"I know it won't please you entirely; but you will respect my conscientious convictions."

"You know, of course, Herbie, they're not offering you a

post because of your worthy life, nor because of your genius. It's on account of your family name."

"I won't dispute that, father. But I can't help my name; and I don't suppose you want me to change it."

"What, precisely, are you going to be?"

"Well, it's rather an elaborate title, and you won't remember it all. I'm Co-ordinator of Statistical Research of the Self-Help Division of the California Emergency Relief Administration."

"Oh, my God!" said old J. Seymour—not even the Presbyterian discipline could check that explosion. "It sounds like the titles the coloured folks get up for the lord high panjandruns of their benevolent societies."

"I know it, father," said Herbert; "but I didn't select the title." He had made up his mind in advance not to have his feelings hurt, and under no circumstances to argue.

"California, hey? Why not Shanghai?"

"We're not relieving them yet, father."

"You will! You'll find yourself Co-ordinator of the Cotton-Shirt Section of the Asiatic Division of New Deal Nuisances."

"Yes, father," replied the other, managing to smile feebly. He knew that his parent fancied his own wit; he knew also that if the old man got going he was liable to talk for a long time.

"What are they paying you?"

"Eight thousand."

"Too much, at your age. Waste of public funds."

"Well, father, you know, I won't have your expectations."

That was a mean shot, and hardly tactful. The old gentleman's salary as president of the International was two hundred and twenty-seven thousand a year—exactly that. There must have been some reason why it was not two hundred and twenty-eight thousand, nor yet two hundred and twenty-six; but whatever the reason, it was buried in the dusty archives of the board of directors. And that was but a small part of the emoluments of J. Seymour's job. Having several hundred million to invest, he knew the market as few men in the world did; he knew what stocks were about to be bought and what were about to be sold, what dividends were about to be paid, and what to be "passed." If anyone had suggested that he should not profit by such information—J. Seymour would have known that he was dealing with a dangerous enemy of the social order.

Herbert's remark had the consequences which might have been foreseen. Said his progenitor: "I was called on to take charge of the affairs of the International Insurance Company nearly thirty years ago, at a time when the investigations of the state legislature developed the fact that a great fiduciary obligation had been regarded with less sacredness than the public had a right to expect. The compensation I have received for the service is less than one-tenth of one per cent of the treasure over which I have the custody. Those I have served have reason to consider that they have received full value for the salary they have paid me."

"Yes, father, of course," said Herbert. "All that I meant was——"

But J. Seymour was not interested in what his son meant. It was the place of fathers to speak, and of sons to listen. The old gentleman had urgent convictions on the subject of the sacred character of his funds, and the philanthropic aspects of his business. He would talk about it to anyone who would listen, and when he once got started it was far from easy to get him to stop.

Scattered over the civilized world were some hundred and forty-seven thousand agents of the International Insurance Company; at least, that was the last figure Herbert had heard. It was the old gentleman's practice to travel from city to city in his private car, and at each stop there would be a banquet in the most expensive hotel—even in these hard times the agents were supposed to enjoy spending ten dollars to listen to the eloquence of their presiding genius. This eloquence was prepared in advance by the statistical and publicity departments; but of late years J. Seymour was making it a habit to depart from his text—somewhat to the distress of his august board of directors. He would ramble, and tell long anecdotes of his early financial triumphs; worst of all, he would get on to the subject of politics, and the menace which was threatening the American system of business. The newspaper reporters would write busily, and next morning there would be scare headlines, and controversy over millions of breakfast tables.

III

This was the time when the NRA was at the height of its activity. Competitive industry was being made over, and

the masters of America were summoned to Washington, and instead of pounding the tables they had to watch others do it, and they had to listen while others talked. So far no official had summoned J. Seymour, but he heard the indignant stories of his friends, and witnessed the onrush of the mad bull of bureaucracy. Already there was talk of government insurance against unemployment and old age; how long would it be before some bright young college professor recalled that insurance companies had a lot of money, and conceived the idea of taxing them out of business, and setting up a government machine to take over the function of supporting the widows and orphans?

"I tell you, my son," said the president of the International, striking the arm of his padded leather chair, "when government undertakes to invade the field of private enterprise, and sap the initiative which has built up the American nation, we are witnessing the beginning of the end of constitutional government as we know it, and are launching ourselves upon the same path which the Russian people travelled into the abyss. It passes my comprehension how my son, having witnessed that nightmare of misery——"

Herbert listened politely for five or ten minutes, and then managed to break in: "I beg you, father, let's not go over the Russian question again. I'm not advocating anything like that, and my duties for the government are relatively modest."

"All right, I'll say no more. When are you planning to leave?"

"I'm flying to-morrow. I have to stop off in Ohio for a few days, to inspect some of the work there. They have made a start at the kind of thing I am supposed to do."

"What is it you are going to do? I naturally have some curiosity as to my son's activities."

"Certainly, father. That is why I came to see you. I am going to help work out a system by which the unemployed can produce at least a part of what they need, instead of having to get it as charity, and at the expense of the taxpayers."

"You say they have started that in Ohio?"

"It is known as the Ohio Plan. Of course it's on a small scale; the unemployed are making mattresses, and doing simple woodwork——"

"They're doing it with capital furnished by the government?"

"Yes, father. They have no capital of their own."

"And don't you see what that will do to private business?"

"The goods are not to come upon the market; they are to be exchanged among the different producing groups."

"But doesn't that take them out of the market, as purchasers of the products of industry?"

"They're already out, father; they have no money, except such as the government gives them."

"Imagine that you are a manufacturer of mattresses in Ohio. You have invested capital in plant and machinery, and have built up trade and goodwill. The slump comes, and you see your life savings disappearing; but you hold on, waiting for this depression to pass, as all depressions have passed in our history—I know you think this one is different, but I tell you the only difference is that a bunch of theorists, college professors and their pupils, have got hold of the ear of the President——"

"You overlook the fact, father, that you spent a lot of money giving me an education with those same professors. And now you object to my making an effort to apply it."

"I am trying to point out to you the obvious consequences of the public policy which you propose to initiate. Is it not obvious that when the unemployed make mattresses for themselves, they remove themselves as possible future customers of the mattress manufacturers, if and when prosperity returns?"

"But, father, are the unemployed to sleep on boards until prosperity returns? For how long would you sentence them to that fate? It has been nearly five years now——"

"If private business were encouraged and reassured—if manufacturers were not frightened by the prospect of being undermined by government competition—we should be on the way back now. But we take measures which destroy the very basis of our prosperity—we make it impossible for anyone to invest money with any certainty of return—and so we make State Socialism inevitable, and put ourselves on the way to revolution and civil war."

"Well, father, it seems to me the way to make revolution and civil war is to let men sleep on bare boards for five years, and give them no hope of getting a mattress for another five years. But you see how it is: we look at the thing differently, and it doesn't do the least good to argue."

J. Seymour Alding sat gazing at this strange young man,

with sandy hair and pale blue eyes and thin, ascetic face with too many lines in it. It wasn't really a weak face, but it seemed so to the father, by contrast to the hearty aspect of himself and his other sons. Herbie was his mother's darling, and he had his mother's sensitiveness—but added to it this strange stubborn streak that was so annoying to a parent who had always had his own way. J. Seymour, as he watched him, was not moved to sympathy by the signs of his son's distress; on the contrary, he felt estrangement, even dislike. He would have been shocked to admit this, and he repressed it deep into his subconscious—from which it emerged in the form of speeches denouncing those college professors who had set themselves to tear down and destroy the things which J. Seymour had spent his whole life in building.

"Well," said the old man at last, "I suppose there's no use of any more discussion. You have made up your mind."

"I have to do what seems right to me, father. Many members of families hold different opinions on these questions. We can each respect the other's good faith, and love each other just the same."

"Yes," replied the other. "I suppose so." He repressed the look of distaste which might have come upon his face—and which would appear in some future tirade as a reference to the hypocrisy of reformers and theorists who pretend to the love of man, when in reality all they are thinking of is "soaking the rich," and punishing those who have won out in the battle of life.

IV

Herbert Alding had in his pocket a letter certifying his appointment to the Federal post with the high-sounding title. He had in a suitcase a mass of books and reports dealing with his subject, and these he diligently studied while the American continent flew past beneath his plane. He was young, and looked even younger, which was a grave handicap. He was without experience, and full of anxiety and self-doubt, but he knew that he must conceal these weaknesses. He was not a religious man, and did not know that he was praying; but now and then as he reflected on his problems he would close his eyes and steel his soul, resolving to stand by the light within him, to keep an open mind and serene temper, resist the forces

of intrigue and self-seeking, and prove that there could be such a thing as dedication to the public service.

He knew enough about the national situation to realize the difficulties before him. The country was being pitchforked into a task of social reconstruction, very much against its will, and in contradiction to its most cherished prejudices. It was marching to a goal which it regarded with aversion, and it persisted in walking the whole journey backwards, bending its knees in adoration to that which it was leaving for ever. It was under the guidance of a President who was excessively amiable, and listened patiently to his many visitors, and promised to do what they asked—and would have done so but for the fact that the next visitor asked for exactly the opposite. His procedure was that of a man who has to build a new house on the site of his old one, but cannot make up his mind to disturb a single brick of the old one, and has to wait until it falls of itself; and while the hod carriers are loading these bricks to be carried to the dump heap, the architect makes a speech solemnly affirming that each and every brick will before long be replaced in the exact spot where it was laid by the founding fathers of the house.

The result was an administration which did things with its right hand and undid them with its left. A branch of the Department of Agriculture was paying hundreds of millions of dollars to farmers as a reward for ploughing cotton under the ground and leaving wheat and corn lands unplanted; while another branch of the same department was circulating pamphlets giving the latest discoveries of science to increase the productivity of cotton, wheat, and corn lands. One branch of the Department of the Interior was draining swamps and clearing thickets, while another branch of the same department was making new swamps and thickets as breeding grounds for wild ducks and partridges.

Such absurdities could be pointed out on every hand, and the enemies of the administration did so; but it had no effect, for the obvious reason that money had to be spent somehow, if the profit system was to be kept from sudden and total collapse. From the point of view of the profit takers it really made no difference how this money was distributed; the same purposes would be served if once every month a billion silver dollars were tossed from the windows of the office buildings of all the land.

"The business of relief," as the President called it, was in the same sort of muddle as everything else. While the Department of Agriculture was ordering the slaughter of "surplus" pigs, and having them buried in trenches to keep them from being used for food, the relief authorities were setting up a corporation to buy surplus foods and distribute them free to the hungry. The President was announcing that no one was to be allowed to starve; while at the same time his aides were confronting the basic fact that under a profit economy the threat of starvation is what keeps people at work. The President announced that all who could not find employment under private industry were to be put at the construction of public works; but he then put in charge of public works a man so conscientious that he could not endure to throw away money as fast as necessary; so the President was forced to set up a special department, the Civil Works Administration, with a special thrower-away of money at its head.

So extreme was the emergency that twelve hundred men would be set to digging a ditch, when only six hundred shovels could be found for them to work with. In the meantime a trench-digging machine, which could have done the whole job in one hour, stood rusting in the rain. If anyone proposed to move it under shelter, the answer was that the quicker it rusted, the sooner the machine-making industry would start up again. If a mistake was made, and the trench was dug too near the bed of a river, there was no need to worry about that; the idle men would bail the river out of the trench with shovels. This would come under the classification of "approved projects," because it required a great deal of labour and few and inexpensive materials.

V

Herbert Alding, Co-ordinator of Statistical Research of the Self-Help Division of the California Emergency Relief Administration, was provided with a suite of offices, including a reasonably decent room for himself, with a desk, a swivel chair, a secretary, and plenty of filing cabinets in which documents could be put away and forgotten. He was supposed to appoint a specified number of assistants at specified salaries; and since the news of his appointment had travelled to Cali-

ifornia more rapidly than his airplane, he found his mail full of applications, and his outer office full of applicants. Herbert had had four years at Princeton, and two postgraduate years, majoring in political science. During these years he had come to know a considerable number of young idealists like himself; but all of them were in the East, while he had to have persons who knew California.

Like every public official in this crisis, he would have a choice between those who had learned about their subjects from college texts and discussions in seminars, but had never actually administered anything, and practical persons who had administered affairs for their own profit and that of employers, but who knew nothing about social service and in their secret hearts regarded it as "the bunk." In other words, he had to choose between persons who had had no practice and those who had practised wrong.

The head of Herbert's division in Washington was a young lady idealist, who likewise was getting her practice as she went along; she had informed Herbert that he was to have nothing to do with politics, and to make no political appointments. What Herbert found was that letters of recommendation came from important political functionaries, and that because he did not make the appointments requested, he made bitter enemies, who set to work to undermine him in California and Washington. He found that, no matter whom he appointed, he made enemies of a score of others who wanted the place. He found that those whom he did appoint frequently had careers of their own to think about, and they pulled wires in the office, and made combinations, and acquired a personal stake in this policy or that. In short, Herbert learned that "politics" is an inseparable part of the activities of human beings.

He aspired to dominate the lives of several hundred thousand families in California. ("Politics is fate," said Napoleon.) The present system of relief was turning them into beggars and parasites; it was making hundreds of "unemployables" every day. It was Herbert's theory that, by applying the science of economics, plus that of psychology, he could reverse this trend and cause most of these persons to become self-supporting and self-respecting American citizens. It was a worthy work, if his theories were correct; even if they were incorrect, it was important to prove that.

Apparently nobody had any other theories as to how the job could be done. They just wanted to leave it undone.

Some two hundred thousand of these heads of families had organized themselves into self-help associations of one sort or another. In the course of the year which had passed they had been pretty well undermined and broken up by intrigue, sabotage, and starvation; but there were still a couple of hundred producers' co-operatives functioning in California, and it was the idea of Herbert and those who were backing him that government credit could be put behind them, and they be allowed to produce and exchange goods, and thus the relief bills would be cut—and the still more wasteful bills for moral and social values.

The unemployed, of course, had also heard the news of this latest New Deal project, and Herbert Alding found his desk stacked with letters asking for immediate "grants"; those waiting in his outer office included not merely applicants for jobs but delegations from this or that co-operative, wanting land, machinery, houses, food, clothing, and above all, money. The young administrator, who had hardly had time to learn the names of all the persons working under him, was being scolded by hungry men and women because of "red tape" and "dilatoriness."

What was a producers' co-operative? And on what terms was it to receive government grants? It was manifest to Herbert, if not to the co-operators, that you couldn't just hand out government money to anybody who came in and said he represented a group of the unemployed. The organization had to be a "going" one. It had to have a charter or constitution or something of the sort; and how much authority should the government take as to how a co-op should be run and who should run it? It had to have an accounting system, so that the government might know what was to be done with money, and might later ascertain whether this had actually been done. Manifestly, whatever the government did would exercise a profound influence upon the future of co-operatives in the state of California; and this was a matter about which the son of J. Seymour Alding said many prayers without knowing what they were.

VI

It was necessary for a co-ordinator of statistical research to travel over the state, and meet with the leaders of the co-ops, and find out what they wanted, and judge them as well as he could. In so doing, the son of J. Seymour Alding carried certain heavy handicaps. In the first place, he was young, and looked more so; he might have quoted to them Pitt's reply to Walpole, but they had never heard of this episode in history. In the second place, he had a Princeton accent, and couldn't change it, in fact was only vaguely aware that he had it. In the next place, he wore very good clothes, while most of those he dealt with wore old and dingy ones. Herbert didn't think about his clothes, and anyhow he didn't know how to get dingy ones. In the next place, he stopped at the most expensive hotel in each city that he visited, and it never occurred to him how this would irritate the co-oppers. He had always stopped at the most expensive hotel—it was the one people told you about when you inquired concerning hotels.

The great deficiency in Herbert's equipment for his new job was his unfamiliarity with working-people. He had met only a few of them, and these had been rebels and idealists like himself. He was apt to judge the ordinary workingman by his rough exterior; he assumed that bad manners and coarse language in such a man meant the same thing as they would have meant in a member of Herbert's own set; whereas they meant nothing except that the man had grown up in mining camps and lumber shacks. In his heart Herbert was afraid of the workers in mass, and wanted to give them the careful guidance of conscientious and instructed persons.

One of the first places to which the young administrator travelled was the city of Seaview. He had to find out about the swarm of co-ops in that part of the state; so he put up at the El Dorado Hotel, and invited Angus McTeagle to pay him a visit in that most fashionable place. It was a very funny thing.

Mac had ceased to be a "workingman" long ago; but he was a self-taught person, and certainly did not have any trace of the Princeton accent. He had given decades to the study of co-operation, and his head was stored with information which might have been of value to Herbert; but it was hard

for Herbert to take it from one who was, to the outer view, a fat and vulgar old man. Nor did Mac make things better by bringing with him the rest of the "holy trinity"—Dan Riker, longshoreman and ex-prizefighter who looked the part, and Bumpy Jones, such an odd-appearing creature, irrepressible and contentious, making jokes at inopportune moments and laughing at them loudly.

It was necessary that the young administrator should make up his mind about these men. Were they genuine friends of the cause of workers' advancement, as they and their allies insisted? Or were they a bunch of racketeers, as their enemies never wearied of repeating? Herbert studied their faces, and listened to their voices, and asked them questions, and strove with the utmost earnestness to probe their souls; and all his efforts did him no good whatever. He just didn't know what to make of them; and having a just mind, he admitted to himself that he wasn't sure. He never did become sure, during the period of his stay on this job.

Perhaps it was proof that they were less just than he, that it did not take them ten minutes to make up their minds about the son of J. Seymour Alding. In fact, they knew before they met him; they knew in the lobby of the El Dorado Hotel, in which men with bulging red necks and fifty-cent cigars in the corner of their mouths sat plotting million-dollar crimes; they knew while they were passing through Peacock Alley, in which the wives and concubines of these men displayed their diamonds in broad daylight and their furs in midsummer. The "trinity" needed only one look at this young sprig of aristocracy, one sentence of his Princeton accent—and they understood that the Squire of Hyde Park had picked out one of his neighbours' idle sons and sent him out here into the wild and woolly West, to give orders to hard-bitten, rough-and-tumble fighters in the class war. When old Mac waddled out of the room he endowed the young administrator with a nickname, "Prince Herbert," which would follow him like a shadow as long as he stayed in California. But the young man himself would never see that shadow!

VII

The federation of co-operatives ruled by McTeagle still spoke for two hundred thousand men, most of them heads of

families. Most of them had been out of work for four years, and had used up their savings; many had lost their homes, and pawned their last belonging, and were completely destitute and in a desperate mood. Their co-operatives, having begged in vain from the authorities of city, county, state, and nation to have tools of production allotted them, were now going the way which many of the old-line labour unions had travelled in the decade after the war—they were turning to mass racketeering.

They would present themselves, one or two hundred strong, in the offices of a wholesale grocery concern, and inform the manager that his "quota" for the relief of the unemployed for that month was a hundred sacks of beans. Of course the manager might summon the police, and have a nasty clubbing of heads in front of his place, and take his chances of having his own head clubbed on a dark night or his warehouse set on fire. Generally the manager would decide to furnish his quota, and charge it up to insurance, or perhaps take it out of his next contribution to the "community chest."

Herbert Alding didn't have to be a genius or a wizard to perceive that this was a dangerous situation. He reported it to his superiors in Washington, and earnestly urged that immediate grants be made, so that persons who had formerly worked and still wanted to work might be able to can fruit and make shirts for themselves, instead of wandering the streets in predatory bands. After due unwinding of red tape and expenditures for stationery, the superiors gave a grudging consent, and Herbert and his new staff set to work to prepare an outline entitled: "Conditions for the Making of Grants for Self-Help Co-operatives."

Each enterprise seeking funds had to bring its accounting system into accord with a standard soon to be set by Herbert. Each had to present a set of "sponsors," persons of standing in the community who would vouch for the honesty and good faith of the concern. Since Herbert did not know the workers, and could not decide about their leaders, he thought it wiser that his staff should make the purchases; the co-ops would specify what they wanted, but Herbert would pay the bills, and in that way be sure that the money was honestly handled.

Of course the last provision infuriated McTeagle and his crowd. They wanted the grants made to the federation, instead of to individual co-ops; and they wanted to handle the

money, and get the credit for it with their own followers, and with the merchants with whom they sought "trading agreements." So far, the fruits of Mac's political policy had afforded slim pickings for his partisans; they had got a bill through the legislature providing for "relief plates" for automobiles—that is to say, the unemployed who still owned cars did not have to pay three dollars a year for their licence plates. That was about all the poor devils had been able to think of to ask from their legislature, and it wasn't much of a showing. Now, if this young upstart had his way in the matter of grants, he would get the honours, and the leaders of the federation would be nowhere. Mac and Dan and Bumpy put "Prince Herbert" on their black-list, and prepared a series of mass demonstrations in the branch offices which he had opened in Seaview.

VIII

The young ruler travelled to other parts of his domain, to make the acquaintance of others of his subjects. He came to San Sebastian, where he was received and handled in a quite different manner. Charlie Day, in the course of his work as a publicity man, had met many "sprigs of aristocracy" and knew how they dressed, and the difference between the Princeton and Harvard accents. He had no pleasure in quarrelling with anybody, and his motto was "wise as the serpent and gentle as the dove."

Motoring to San Sebastian, and arriving late in the afternoon, Herbert found that a suite had already been engaged for him at the El Capitán Hotel, a quite gorgeous place in the Spanish style, with patios and palm trees and fountains galore. He learned that he was invited to dine at the home of a certain Miss Mabel Saugus, one of the sponsors of the Self-Help Exchange. "Informal" said the card, and Herbert prepared for the worst.

He was keeping his eyes open, learning everything he could about California and its population. When at the end of a hot summer's day he drove into the canyon where Mabel had her home, he knew at once that this meant money, and he wondered, as moneyed people do, how much and what kind and for how long. He had never heard of the Saugus salt mines, and the name meant nothing to him. When he entered the home, he saw at a glance that it must be new money; but

after all, he was used to the old bad taste of his father's home and would not be shocked by new bad taste in what he thought of as a pioneer land.

The hostess came to greet him; a tall, large-framed young woman, with reddish hair and face not pretty at all, but frank and honest. The moment she spoke, he knew a Western voice; he knew those big hands had done honest work on some ranch. As a young administrator with a burden of responsibility likely to grow heavier, he found himself speculating about each new person he met: "What could I do with this one?" So now he was thinking about Mabel Saugus: "She looks intelligent. I wonder how much she really knows about co-ops."

An upstanding, alert-looking man came forward: Charlie Day. Herbert had corresponded with him and knew that he was the chairman; a man who talked freely, but only when he knew what he was talking about; obviously one you could deal with. Then a handsome, fashionable-looking young fellow—Dr. John Cass, the head of the medical section, and his pretty young wife. Finally, a big chap, a barrel of a man who looked as if he had had a hard time finding a ready-made suit of clothes big enough for him; apparently a workingman, but a good one, with keen face and good-natured, twinkling eyes. Soren was his name, and he provided the proletarian flavour.

These six persons sat down to a simple but good dinner, served by a couple of maids in white aprons and caps. The guests were friendly people, and this was a friendly way to find out about a co-op; the way that Herbert was used to. At home, or in Princeton, everyone would have been in evening dress; but this was the West, the end of the world, and it was all right. Herbert could ask questions about the Self-Help Exchange, and get intelligent answers; he could tell these people a few of his problems, and get understanding and useful advice. His hostess, at whose right hand he sat, was kind and sympathetic; Charlie Day, who sat across the table from him, had the facts and figures at his fingers' ends; while that big, red-headed Dane, that grown-up sailor boy who sat on Herbert's right hand, had studied psychology in mining camps and the forecastles of ships, and knew that whether a man was rich or poor, it was all the same if you were honest with him, and meant his welfare on a just basis.

IX

With these new friends Herbert discussed the various regulations he was going to issue. First, the accounting system. It was manifest that the government had to deal with all the co-operatives on an equal basis, and had to have means of comparing their financial status. The system of "points" varied widely. Here in San Sebastian they had a hundred points for an hour's work, but in Seaview they paid one per minute. It was necessary that the government require all financial statements to be expressed in dollars; the co-op leaders objected to this, and what could be done about it?

Charlie explained that it was a simple process to change points into dollars, but when you had done it, you had turned a true statement into a false one. The co-op owed labour, but it didn't owe dollars, and had never promised to pay them. On the books of the Self-Help Exchange were now showing debts of three or four million points, and the members were always getting into a panic over that; it was necessary to show them that this was only a week's work per member—then they would laugh over it. But if you said it was sixty or eighty thousand dollars, they would be ready to quit right there; that much money looked as big as the moon to them right now.

"You must remember, Mr. Alding," said the chairman, "we are dealing with rather primitive minds, and names are things."

Herbert answered: "You must remember that I am dealing with bureaucratic minds, and to them also names are things, and often the whole thing."

They could all laugh over that, but they had no answer, and the decision was that the co-ops would have to shoulder this extra burden and make their financial statements in a form which could be understood in Washington, D.C.

They discussed the form in which money was to be sought for the co-ops. Charlie wanted it to be a loan, but Herbert told him that under the law this was impossible; the law called for "grants," and there could be no provision for repayment—nobody would take the money. Charlie pointed out the moral effect of this upon the membership; they wanted to be independent and preserve their self-respect. But Herbert smiled, and said that nobody had suggested to Congress that

there might be a group of American citizens unwilling to beg from the government.

"After all, Mr. Day," he added, "you must admit that it's rather an academic question. It will be a long time before you could be in a position to repay anything."

"I don't admit that at all," said Charlie. "Give us the means to start an extractive industry on a really modern scale, and we'll make our people self-supporting and pay all our debts in one year."

"What industry, for example?"

"Well, I know of a lumber property that is in bankruptcy proceedings. It could be bought for about fifty thousand dollars, which is nothing on the American scale of things. We could rebuild the mill and equip it for another twenty thousand, and with lumber, we can get everything else we need."

"You mean by trading it?"

"Exactly."

"But what would the Lumber Dealers' Association say to that?"

"Of course, if we are to be hamstrung by the fear of what private business will do to us——"

"My dear fellow," said Herbert, "when you take a government job, one of the first things you learn about is the lobbies in Washington, and what they will do to you if you step on their toes. You understand, of course, all this is between us."

"Oh, certainly. But then, what are the co-ops to do, if we're not allowed to trade?"

"You'll be allowed to trade among yourselves—that is the only way the thing can be put through."

The young administrator went on to outline the plan which was taking form in his mind, or the collective mind which he had gathered in his suite of offices. The grants made to the different co-ops were to be of such a character that each would specialize in a different form of production, and the various units would be integrated in one system. If the Self-Help Exchange of San Sebastian went in for large-scale lumber production, it would become the lumber source of all the other co-operatives of the state.

"But, Mr. Alding," put in Sig Soren, "aren't you overlooking the fact that lumber is a heavy industry? We could

ship to Chile more cheaply than we could to places in the interior of this state."

"Quite so, Mr. Soren; but when you have political limitations, they are just as real as economic ones. If you ship lumber to Chile, how long would it be before our office in Washington would hear from some department to promote trade with South America, claiming that we were destroying that trade? It would happen before you even got started. They would argue, and quite truly, that you would be putting your people at work, and at the same time putting out of work the employees of the lumber dealers."

X

They discussed Herbert's plan in relation to other activities of the San Sebastian group. They had some twenty acres planted to tomatoes, and in a couple of weeks they would be overwhelmed by a flood, a veritable Niagara of this vegetable—or is it a fruit? Anyhow they would have to declare "field days" again, and all the headquarters staff, which included an ex-clergyman, and a superannuated physician, and the former head of a broker's office, and a civil engineer, and a motion-picture operator, and a former African explorer, and three accountants and five stenographers—all these ladies and gentlemen would put on their old clothes—for most of them this would not require a change—and bend their backs and make their feet brown with the soil and their hands green with the juice of tomato plants.

The son of J. Seymour Alding, fresh from a seminar of Princeton University where this whole plan had been set forth, insisted that this was a wasteful procedure. There should be co-ops which specialized in agriculture, and had workers trained for those tasks. Instead of canning their products over oil stoves, as they were doing here, there should be one modern canning plant—Herbert was proposing to make a grant for this purpose to one of the large co-ops in the city of Seaview, and it was his idea that all the tomatoes should go there. To be sure it was a hundred miles away, but big trucks could carry two or three hundred boxes of tomatoes in a load, and the cost per box would not be heavy. The trucks could bring back goods already canned, and the rest would go to

other co-ops, and to the CCC camps, and the relief people—the whole of the unemployed of the state would be the potential consumers of San Sebastian tomatoes.

The same thing was to be done with sewing, mattress making, furniture, shirts, shoes, soap, and so on down the line. It was a grand plan—for anyone who trusted the government and the politicians who handle its affairs. But Charlie Day was not one of these. He didn't believe that the businessmen would let such a thing happen—not yet—and if it did get a start they would wreck it, through the politicians or otherwise.

Mabel Saugus mentioned to her guest that Sig Soren was now building up the EPIC organization in this city; and of course, if EPIC should succeed, and put the power of the state of California behind such a plan, that would be a different matter. But what Charlie Day was afraid of was risking the independence of their little group. They had worked so hard, and made so many sacrifices—they would rather starve along at hand labour than put themselves in a position where their tomato crop had to be turned over to some other group, which might be in the midst of a revolution at the moment the crop was ripe.

"We've had about eight revolutions ourselves," explained Mabel, "all in our twenty-two months; and we've heard enough about the federation in Seaview to know how difficult it is to discipline and control two hundred thousand people who are ignorant, and without resources, and have been preyed upon all their lives. There would have to be a strong central controlling force——"

"Of course," said Herbert. "That is what we would expect to furnish."

"We ' meaning what? " asked Mabel.

"The Self-Help Division."

"But then, Mr. Alding, suppose you shouldn't be satisfied with the way the plan is being carried out, and you should resign. That is the kind of thing we've been seeing in the government service—endless muddlement and confusion and change of plan. We are told one thing, and then a week later we are told that there have come revised instructions, or that somebody has been replaced, and that we have to fill out a lot of new blanks and prepare a new set of affidavits. Would you believe it, when we got a grant of five thousand dollars for two

trucks, we had to prepare a set of forty-one affidavits signed by various officials of our exchange, and by persons who swore they were the officials they claimed to be, and had a right to sign the vouchers they had signed."

"I know," said Herbert, sadly; "the routine of government is exhausting and discouraging——"

"Exactly, Mr. Alding," broke in Mabel, earnestly; "but we don't want to become exhausted or discouraged. We have our little group of co-ordinators, and we deal every afternoon with the problems of that day; we know what they are, and we discuss them and settle them on the spot, most of the time without even having to take a vote. We get things done, and we want to keep that local autonomy, and not have to refer questions to Washington, nor even to Seaview, nor to your office. We'd rather produce less, and have the tools in our own hands, and the control of them."

The son of J. Seymour Alding listened carefully to all these arguments, as was his custom. But meanwhile, in one portion of his brain, something was saying: "What a fine straightforward young woman! I like a woman like that—no nonsense about her. I wonder who she is, and if I could fit her into our organization."

XI

The next day Herbert devoted to inspecting the operations of the Self-Help Exchange. Bright and early he was at the headquarters, missing nothing, from the bulletin board near the door to the comics in the newspapers of the office ceiling. On the board there were now listed sixty-nine varieties of service and instruction which could be had on "points"; beginning with agronomics and art, and ending with watch repairing and the xylophone. Charlie and Mabel, who acted as guides on this tour, told of odd deals which had been put through. Thus, Mrs. Emily Butters had had a baby on points, and Mrs. Jane Pitter had got a divorce from her drunken husband; Dad Slemp had got a better-fitting set of false teeth, and several of the contact section were looking fit for duty, because they had found a tailor who had fixed them up with "custom-made" suits.

Most of the main floor was now taken up by the canning work. There were a dozen stoves lined against the wall, and

all had kettles bubbling or being filled. They were finishing up the last of the peach crop—they had trucks enough this year to handle the fruit they were picking on shares, and many groups of members were canning in their own homes. All their contact people were out scouting for jars which could be used for preserving; they even had advertisements in the newspapers—where they had accounts on points, because they washed windows and cleaned offices and did jobs for one publisher and his staff.

In the loft was the printing plant, which now was becoming one of their best-paying enterprises. Originally they had had nothing but a little amateur outfit belonging to Philosophus, the lover of the love of knowledge; on that they had got out their bulletins, and their weekly paper called *The Pointer*. Recently they had been able to get a good press with an electric motor, of which they were proud, and with it they were building up a job-printing business. All merchants needed letterheads, and you could trade a job of printing for butter, or carpenter's tools, or laths for tying up tomato plants, or a part for an automobile—almost anything.

Mabel told how they had faced the problem of possible opposition from big printing firms. Sig Soren had picked out the biggest of the printers; he went to see the man, and told him the story of a group of people struggling to earn their daily bread, and asked this gentleman to give them advice out of his vast experience. He had been rather staggered, but had not been able to refuse, and had loaned them some of his style-books, and sent one of his best men over to show how to make up letterheads for the fastidious. Since then, no kicks!

Over at a table by the window sat a young man with a lot of little tools; he was a wood-cut artist, and was making designs for such letterheads; they were printing for the Quinn Hardware—that was old Mr. Thee Fleming—in exchange for six dozen cases of Mason jars which they were now filling with boiling peaches. Bowing and smiling in front of them was an odd little man, as rosy as a peach and brown as peach-tree bark, wearing a shirt with short sleeves and panties with short legs, and a red bandanna handkerchief wound about his head—that was Philosophus, their pioneer printer, who was also an astrologer, and could cast your horoscope and tell you what days were best for planting—though they did not take his advice.

He still got out the *Pointer*, and had the new issue just off the press, with the ink still smudgy. He gave one to Herbert, who thus had a chance to see all the odd things the co-op was calling for on points that week; the means of making roofing paper; some ranch land that could be leased for a village; gallon measures for the baker, and ladders for the painter; silk materials for draperies, and electric irons for pressing them; old electric cords, paper bags for the commissary, more chairs for the restaurant, four trimming axes, and blocks and cables for pulling trees; above all, preserving jars—and everybody urged to return empty lug-boxes at the earliest possible moment!

Then the little notes recording some of their successes. They were getting old wire from the telephone company for the holding up of tomato plants. They had gathered a ton of cabbage leaves, and had cleaned out an asphalt pit and got a ton of bean straw for fertilizer. The wrecking crew had got twelve thousand feet of lumber from one building. They had a contract to cut wood for a dozen sheep, and one to pick prunes for stumpage, and another to tend lawns of gas stations for oil. "You remember the last time," said the *Pointer*—"we got a hundred cases of twelve cans and they were all gone in a week. Come early!"

XII

Some of the more presentable of the co-op's activities had been moved to a new two-story office building which they had got on points. Downstairs was the clinic, where members got medical and dental services, repaying a score of doctors and dentists with wood and canned goods, and fresh vegetables, and repairs on their homes and the care of their lawns, and of their children—anything else from art to xylophone. A notice on the bulletin board here set forth that you could get prescriptions filled and also food allergy tests by trade agreement with the Excelsior Pharmacy. At the back was a little room where Tony Spadoni now had his barbershop according to law, with hot and cold running water, and a proper sign out in front—to say nothing of an assistant to stay on the job while Tony was growing his onions and garlic!

Upstairs was the sewing section, and interior decoration—for others, of course, not the co-op! Also the art department

—it was surprising how many ranchers liked to have their portraits painted in exchange for surplus prunes and eggs, and how many landscapes showing mountain lakes with snow on top of the mountains could be traded for chicken droppings. And the music section—how many working-class children wanted to learn to play the violin or the saxophone, and how many tickets for concerts at ten cents each could be sold by one thousand co-op families!

Then the big garage, where members had their cars repaired on points, and non-members on trade agreements. Back of this was a little foundry, where they melted scrap-iron. And then the apartments—the co-op now had half a dozen buildings on points; they kept them in repair and did work for the owners on other buildings, and paid the taxes by charging their members part cash and part points.

Charlie drove Herbert to see all these sights, using Mabel's comfortable car, with Mabel's company. Of course they had to see all the gardens, of which everybody was so proud. When you see a tomato in a grocery, it is a commonplace object, one among hundreds, worth perhaps one cent; but when you have dickered with a landowner for a vacant tract, and persuaded a friendly oilman to let you dig up a lot of two-inch pipe and lay it so as to carry water to your field; and when you have sweated in the sun and tended young plants like so many babies, and vangled old building lath from the school board and wire from the telephone company, and tied up the vines, and sprayed them, and watched the crop through storm and drought—well, then, tomatoes begin to acquire a meaning to you, and you know how working-people pay for what they get in this world. You see the fruit hanging from the vines by thousands; they grow bigger and smoother and shinier every day; until the time when they begin to turn from green to dark red—and right at that point you are asking whether the contact section has found markets, and whether there are going to be enough lugs, and jars, and trucks, and labour.

To say nothing of twenty other kinds of vegetables! Herbert was told the story of old Jerry Mason, who had been classified as unemployable, but this was the second year he had wrought his miracles in field after field. In the beginning he had worked with his own hands and back, but now he had some two score men and travelled from one patch to another, inspecting and making suggestions, not often having to scold,

because he had the co-operative spirit and knew how to convey it to others. To say nothing of the love of plants; the pleasure in seeing that every kind of growing thing got exactly the treatment it needed, enough sun, enough water and no villain weed to steal its nutriment or light!

Everything laid out in perfect rows, all the plants of exactly the right colour, and staked up and tied and trained if they needed it—yes, these were fields to be shown to a young administrator who had been trained in college seminars and wasn't sure that the working class could be trusted with land and tools and materials and the control of their own destinies! Herbert Alding looked and listened, and came back to his hotel rather tired, but beginning to think that Charlie Day's idea of local autonomy might have something to it after all. Perhaps it might be wiser to let the Self-Help Exchange of San Sebastian keep all those diversified industries which it had started!

CHAPTER XII

SCANDAL

I

"MR. LEN SAUGUS," read the visiting-card, and it didn't sound like a fashionable name. Mrs. Virginia Beverly Trent, who did have a fashionable name, studied the card critically. It was properly engraved, and in script; whereas real estate and life insurance salesmen mostly had printed cards. "I don't suppose the agents who sell brushes have taken to using visiting-cards," said Mrs. Trent to the maid; and the answer was, "He hasn't got anything with him, ma'am." So Mrs. Trent said, "I'll see what he wants."

She went to the mirror and took a look. She saw a face which might have been called thin, although its owner preferred to think of it as "delicately chiselled." It was in the best of taste, except for the tip-tilted nose, not entirely becoming to her years. The complexion was of that fair kind which is so lovely in youth, but fades quickly, and can never be taken into the sun because of freckles. Just a tiny touch of pink on each cheek, and a dab of powder on the end of the nose, the replacing of one strand of hair—after that it was all right for a strange man to see her. For a moment Mrs. Trent considered

changing the morning jacket with large red and gold butterflies on it; but she decided that women were wearing all sorts of odd things nowadays, there really were no rules.

She went in the drawing-room of her apartment, and saw that her visitor was decidedly not aristocratic. He was tall, big-boned, rather gawky; he had large hands, and his face and neck had that leathery look which can be got only by staying out in the sun and wind for a lifetime. But the man's clothes were pressed, and looked to be well made; the hostess reflected that you can never tell about these California men. He was standing up, and his manner was respectful.

"I am Mrs. Trent," she said, stopping near the door of the room.

"I am Mr. Saugus," said he; and these little things tell their story to ladies of the world. A member of her set would not have referred to himself as "Mister."

"I am from San Sebastian," he added; and that city figured largely in her thoughts—but for reasons which she would not mention to a stranger

"Won't you sit down?" she said, politely, and took her seat a decorous distance away.

"Mrs. Trent," began the visitor, who appeared for some reason to be nervous, "I have taken the liberty of calling on you with regard to the so-called EPIC movement."

"Indeed?" said the lady, in surprise.

"It is an important one, and I am deeply concerned about it. Would you be willing to tell me how you feel about it?"

"Well, really, Mr. Saugus, I have never been much interested in political matters."

"It is not merely a political matter; it is a grave economic question."

"I suppose so; but I can hardly claim to be well informed."

"We are all citizens and voters, Mrs. Trent."

"Yes, of course." She was thinking to herself: "How strange! Have these people money enough to send canvassers around? Or is this man working without pay?"

"You have read something about the movement, ma'am?"

"I read the papers. But I can't say I have a clearly formed opinion. I have to rely upon what my friends advise me."

"I hope I am not being intrusive, ma'am. I am interested in knowing public sentiment on this subject. Would you be willing to tell me what your friends advise?"

"Well, they seem to think it is a dangerous movement, and a threat to property rights."

"Is that the opinion to which you tend?"

"I think I would say that it is, Mr. Saugus."

"You are not a sympathizer with the EPICS?"

"No, certainly I am not that. Why should you imagine it?"

"Well, you see, ma'am, the fact that I live in San Sebastian—I hope you won't think it presumptuous of me to bring up these matters——"

For some reason this strange gentleman seemed to have difficulty in coming to the point. In the effort to help him, Mrs. Trent said: "Are you yourself what you call an EPIC?"

"Oh, no, ma'am; I assure you—my opinion is that of your friends."

"Oh! Then why do you wish to question me?"

"Well, you see, ma'am, it's like this. Living in San Sebastian, and with your daughter taking the stand that she does——"

"Oh! You know my daughter?"

"No, ma'am, I have never met her. But naturally I hear a lot about her."

"Then it is about my daughter's activities that you have come to see me?"

"Yes, Mrs. Trent, that is it. I hope you will pardon me——"

"I will be able to tell better, Mr. Saugus, when I know about your errand. I beg you to come to the point."

II

Len Saugus, who had spent several hours planning this interview and rehearsing his speeches, now cleared his throat, summoned his courage and took the plunge.

"Well, you see, ma'am, the fact of the matter is I am active in a society of patriotic people, who are trying to save this country from what we feel to be a grave menace. I wanted to talk to you about it, but first I thought I ought to find out how you yourself feel about these things. It might

be that you didn't realize the seriousness of the danger—you might even be one of these people—and if so, you possibly wouldn't wish to hear what I know."

"I am interested in anything about my daughter, Mr. Saugus. I beg you to tell me what has brought you here."

"Well, ma'am, it's like this. We are keeping track of the dangerous Reds in America. It is a thankless task, but somebody has to do it. For more than two years now we have been watching one of the most active agitators, a foreigner who is here, we feel quite certain, as a secret agent of Roossia, stirring up discontent among our working-people and inciting them to revolution. This man is an ex-convict—he was in two prisons in Alaska, as we are able to prove. We know that he killed a man, but unfortunately we haven't the legal proof of that. Right now he is leading the EPIC movement in our city, and carrying on a bitter, demagogic campaign—you know what it is, they mean to tax all the wealth out of the state, and make it impossible for prosperity ever to come back to us. It is the most terrible menace that has come to our country in my lifetime, ma'am."

Mrs. Trent sat gazing at this earnest gentleman, and a cold fear was beginning to lay hold of her heart. "Yes, Mr. Saugus," said she. "Pray go on."

"Well, ma'am, it is hard for me to talk about this, because of an unhappy situation in my own family. You are one person who will be able to sympathize with me, I feel sure."

"How is that?"

"You see, my younger sister has fell into the toils of this wretch. It so happens that both my sister and me enjoy fortunes—not so great since the depression, and the income taxes which this man Roosevelt has imposed upon us—but still, we have money, and this ex-convict knows it. You understand what his attitude would be to a young woman who has money; these Reds pretend to think that large fortunes are wicked, but that don't keep them from trying to get all they can for themselves."

"I understand, Mr. Saugus."

"This man wormed his way into my sister's confidence—she is idealistic, you see, and wants to help the poor. So do I, ma'am, but I know that you would only make the lot of the poor worse, if you undermine the great industries which is the basis of our prosperity. The way to improve the lot of

the poor is to enable we men who understand industry to go ahead and produce more. That is the method by which America has become the richest country in the world, and has been able to have the most highly paid workers in the world. You agree with that, ma'am?"

"It sounds reasonable. Pray continue."

"Well, this man wormed his way into my sister's home, and weaned her away from me entirely. We do not meet any more. He gets money from her for what he calls his causes—she has done most of the financing of this EPIC movement in San Sebastian, so that it looks like they was really going to carry the city in the elections next month. It is truly frightful, Mrs. Trent."

"Yes, Mr. Saugus."

"For a while I was afraid the man was going to persuade my sister to marry him. He already has a wife and several children, but he does not live with them—you understand, of course, marriage means nothing to these Reds. His wife is divorcing him, so he claims, though we have not yet checked on that. His wife and her parents are active Commoonists in another part of the state. You can imagine my feelings at the prospect of having such a man for a brother-in-law. But now it appears that the danger has been spared me, for the man has become interested in another young woman."

"Oh, Mr. Saugus!" Poor Mrs. Trent sat with her hands clasped, and a look of agonized anticipation.

"You are perhaps aware, ma'am, that your daughter has been staying in that place they call a co-operative?"

"Yes. I have been troubled about it."

"It has been necessary as a measure of public safety for our organization to have contacts in the place, to know what is going on and what is being plotted. The co-op, as they call it, is supposed to enable unemployed persons to become self-supporting; and of course that is a worthy thing, and if the pretence was genuine, I would be helping it myself. Some of our best people has been deceived by it. But we who watch the Reds know that the organization is in the hands of men who have no thought but to undermine American institutions, and seize the property of the rich, and visit upon us the horrors which we have seen in Roossia."

"Yes, Mr. Saugus. But my daughter?"

"You wish me to tell you the full truth, ma'am?"

"Of course, please—tell me at once."

"Your daughter has been in this place now—I think all this year; and this man is very plausible, a skilled seducer. Of course if the woman has money, his purpose is marriage—otherwise, he just wants what men of that brutal class want from young women. I assure you this co-operative is a regular love nest—the men and women do not trouble about marriage at all—they make no bones about it."

"Oh, Mr. Saugus, you terrify me! Please—what—?"

"It is hard for me to speak these words, ma'am, but I have no choice. Your daughter has been living in adulterous relations with this man for several months."

Mrs. Virginia Beverly Trent gave a moan, and bowed her head, and covered her shamed face with her trembling hands. Sobs began to shake her, and there was a long pause.

"I am so sorry, ma'am," said Len Saugus, at last. "You can see how hard it was for me to come here on such an errand. Only a sense of the grave emergency forced me to take the step."

"It was right for me to know," said the unhappy lady, in a low voice. "But are you really sure that the worst is true?"

"We have made it our business to be sure, ma'am."

"Oh, my poor daughter!" Mrs. Virginia Beverly Trent raised an anguished face. "You can imagine what this does to a mother!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, ma'am; I know what I feared for my own sister."

"I must go to my daughter at once!" she exclaimed, making as if to rise.

"Pardon me, ma'am," said Len. "I hope you will consent to hear a little more about it. There is things you need to know, before you are sure you are taking the right step."

So Mrs. Trent sank back. "All right. Please go on."

III

Len Saugus summoned his courage again, and proceeded to reveal the idea which he had conceived, and which had brought him all the way from San Sebastian. "It is a question of how to break up this affair, ma'am. If you don't mind confiding in me—am I right in thinking that you have not been able to persuade or control your daughter?"

"I am sorry to say that is true—or she would never have lived in that horrible place."

"Well, ma'am, you speak of going to her at once. Do you think you can control her now?"

"You mean she would defy me and stay with that man?"

"I can't say, ma'am—I am asking you. We are certain that she is infatuated with him; she thinks he is a hero and a great leader of reform. That is the perverted point of view of these Commoonists. With it they seduce not merely women, but intellectuals, and people of wealth—they are now engaged in seducing the voters of California. That is what we have to meet, ma'am."

"Does my daughter know that this man is an ex-convict?"

"He laughs that off as an error of his youth. He says he committed burglary because he was starving. Well, ma'am, if that was the morality of the American people right now, our police might have a million burglars to deal with."

"Of course; that is no excuse."

"But you see, your daughter believes in the man; she and him are working together to build up this EPIC movement. They are speaking at meetings nearly every night——"

"My daughter speaks?"

"I think she helps to organize the meetings for him. And we who believe in law and order, and our American government—it is hard for us to combat him. I personally have contributed more than ten thousand dollars to the campaign, and I have been the means of raising ten times as much. But it is hard to make headway against the seductions of a clever rascal like this Sig Soren. We are very anxious to open the eyes of the public to his true character before they go to the polls next month. My purpose in coming here is to urge you to look upon the matter as a public duty, and help us save our state from chaos and ruin."

"But what can I do, Mr. Saugus?"

"You are perhaps the one person in California that is able to unmask this villain, and drive him from our midst in disgrace."

"How can I do that?"

"We have in our state a law against adultery. It is unfortunately a law which is widely violated, and seldom enforced. But it remains on the books, and can be used in a public emergency like this."

"You mean that you would have me—ask me to——"
Poor Mrs. Trent was unable to say the thought.

"We have took the matter to the district attorney, ma'am. He points out the fact that this law has been dead and forgotten for years; and it might appear like persecution if he was to apply it to a political enemy. It might have just the opposite effect from what we hope, ma'am. But if a mother was to step in to save her daughter—then the moral sentiment of the whole community would rally, everybody would feel that it was right. Strange as it may seem to you, this ex-convict has been advocating the EPIC revolution in churches, and it looks like he is going to get a part of the church vote. But if we could have him indicted on charges of adultery and seduction—then smash! he would be out, and decent people would flee from him like he had the plague."

"Oh, Mr. Saugus!" exclaimed the distracted mother. "Think of the publicity! I would be branding my poor daughter!"

"I know, my dear ma'am; but then think of your daughter being in the toils of this man, perhaps for the rest of her life! It is the one way you can be sure to separate her from him."

"Mr. Saugus," pleaded the lady, "I really don't know what to say. I am so overwhelmed by the dreadfulness of this news. I am so ashamed for my unhappy daughter."

"I know, ma'am," said Len; "and of course you will have to have time to think it over. But at least you ought to know what we are hoping for; and perhaps if it works out that your daughter refuses to take your advice, you will have this threat to hold over her."

"That is true; and I know I am under a debt of obligation to you. I am sure you are a sincere person, and perhaps you are right about what ought to be done. My first step must be to hurry to my daughter and find out what she has to say for herself."

"Permit me a suggestion, Mrs. Trent; I hope you won't take it amiss. I have my car with a chauffeur at the door, and I am going straight back to San Sebastian. If you would permit me to take you, I would be greatly honoured; and we would be able to talk the matter out on the way."

IV

So there was Mrs. Virginia Beverly Trent, doing just what her daughter had done against her resolve—riding in an automobile with two strange men! But this time the fates were kinder. Len Saugus was no agent of the white slave traffic, but a Christian gentleman, animated by the highest motives of patriotism, and deeply respectful in his attitude to a stricken mother.

They followed perforce the same highway over which Maisie had travelled some eight months previously; and if Mrs. Trent had possessed what are called "psychic" gifts, she surely would have shuddered at places on that road. The place where Maisie had been hailed by Ben and Jake and Bess in the car, and had yielded to her weariness; the street where the car had turned off to the house of the swami who taught "the Hindu arts of love"; the place where the girl had come so close to flinging open the car door, and throwing herself over the white-painted barrier; the place where she had alighted in the rain, and groped her way for miles in the darkness. All these places Mrs. Trent passed in broad daylight; and while she did shudder, it was because of what the kind Mr. Saugus was telling her about the activities of the Reds in California, and especially the wickedness of that secret agent of Moscow, "Comrade" Sigvald Soren.

"Really," Mrs. Trent was saying, "I had no conception of these awful things! Can it really be true that five or ten million people starved to death in Russia last year?"

The representative of the Better America Federation assured her that it was strictly true, he had heard a lecture by a man who had been through the Ukraine where it had happened. Mrs. Trent said it was shocking how ignorant the average American was about the doings of his country's enemies; she promised to join the federation, and contribute from time to time as her modest means would permit.

The "psychic" gifts which had been denied to Mrs. Virginia Beverly Trent were also lacking in her daughter. While the mother was suffering such distress, Maisie was cheerfully working in EPIC headquarters, most of the time at the telephone, calling people and arranging for a feat they were planning—to place a copy of a special campaign edition of their paper in every home in San Sebastian. Maisie had

got two months' leave of absence from the co-op in order to do such work, and she was so happy at it that sometimes she felt twinges of conscience, because she was able to enjoy life while so many other people were having a hard time.

Not until she went to the "Grubshop" for her dinner did she get a hint of what was coming. One of her room-mates brought a telegram which had been delivered at the co-op, and Maisie read: "Arrive El Capitán Hotel about eight this evening meet me urgent. Mother." Maisie said: "Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" and passed it on to Sig Soren to read.

"Does that mean she's going to try to take you home?" asked the man.

"She surely can't have any hope of that. I'm afraid she's come to be reconciled, and that won't be so good as it sounds."

"Why not?"

"You'd have to know mother. She won't like anything she sees here. You know, Sig, the co-op is a drab and dingy place, if you haven't got the dream."

"I suppose so," admitted the man.

"It's like going to Russia, and not understanding what it means—you see one huge slum. Mother will go into our headquarters and see nothing but worn furniture and patched old clothes, and smell the musty odour, and think it's perfectly dreadful."

"Perhaps I better not meet her," said Sig.

"Not if I can help it, dear. She would hear you say 'I done it' or 'I would have went,' and she would give her daughter up for a lost soul."

"I don't make them mistakes as much as I used to," said Sig, with the twinkle in his good brown eyes.

V

Maisie was at the hotel when her mother arrived; and one look at her face told the girl that something serious was on the way. Mrs. Trent scorned the modern custom of putting on your make-up right out in public; so here she was, coming through the lobby of a swanky hotel with perfectly plain evidence that she had shed streams of tears and wiped them off recklessly. The way she looked at her daughter indicated that she had already given her up for "a lost soul."

What could have happened? Maisie had a few minutes in

which to put her wits to work, while her mother was registering and engaging a room, and they were going up in the elevator. Maisie knew that she had only one secret; and if her mother had found out anything it must be that. "Be careful!" said a voice within.

After the bellboy had turned on the lights and opened the bags, and pulled down the window shades, and collected his tip and shut the door, Maisie went quietly and closed the transom. Then she turned and said, "Well, mother, what is it?"

One look at the girl's determined face seemed to tell Mrs. Trent the worst. She began to weep; and Maisie waited, as she had learned to do.

At last Mrs. Trent set her countenance as firmly as her daughter's, and said: "All right, Maisie—tell me the truth. Are you living with a married man?"

Maisie saw that she had indeed to be careful! "Mother," she countered, "who has been telling you about my affairs?"

Weeping began to give place to anger—as it so often had in the past. "Is that your answer to such a charge?"

"Have you an anonymous letter? If so, please let me see it."

"Oh, how dreadful! You admit the charge?"

"I admit nothing. I ask you: Did you receive a letter?"

"I received no letter."

"A telegram, or a telephone call, perhaps? Somebody was in a great hurry?"

"Nothing of the sort."

"Then somebody came to see you? Somebody who was afraid I might be too happy? Or somebody who is afraid the EPICS may carry the state of California? Which?"

"I ask my daughter to deny the charge that she is living in sin; and she will not answer!"

"I ask my mother who is telling tales about me; and she will not answer."

So there they were at a deadlock. They knew every step in this duel of wills. Too frequent repetition of it had driven Maisie from home; and she had no mind to go back to the old bad habit.

"Mother," said she, "we are in the midst of a hot political fight, and we live surrounded by enemies. We know they are trying by every means in their power to distract us and

waste our time, and I for one don't intend to let them succeed. You made a great mistake to come here on such an errand. I have important work to do, and unless you are ready to talk sense to me, I'm going to say good night, and go back to headquarters."

"What do you mean by talking sense, my daughter?"

"It would be so easy for you to answer my questions. Who has told you about my affairs?"

"Maisie, I am staggered. I came here hoping against hope that you would repel this vile slander. But instead, I find you hard as nails."

"When I lived at home, mother, I had plenty of time to waste—because I wasn't allowed to have anything useful to do. But now, as I told you, I really have work, and I am happy in doing it."

"You are happy trying to undermine our country and turn it over to the Reds?"

"Oh, my God—so that's it! Well, dear mother, we have literature explaining all that, and I have learned to carry it about with me." Maisie reached into her handbag, and fished out several leaflets. "This one is headed: 'Are EPICS Red?' Read it for me. And now, good night."

Maisie started to the door, but was stopped by a cry, louder and angrier than any she could recall from the past. "Stop! Don't you dare go out of that door!"

"Why not, mother?"

"Brazen hussy! Don't imagine that I have come here for nothing, or that I am going to permit my daughter to defy the laws of God, and to mock at her mother's love!"

"What do you mean to do, mother? Have me arrested?"

"Jeer all you please; but I warn you—if you go out of that door, I shall have your paramour in jail before this night is over."

"Well, well!" said Maisie. Decidedly, she had better not go! "What is the charge to be?"

"The charge will be seduction."

"But have you informed them about my age, mother? It will be easy to consult the birth records and prove that I am past the age of consent."

"So you went into your sin deliberately! But apparently nobody informed you there is a law against adultery in California."

"Is there really? It sounds rather funny, with all that we know is going on! So that's the scheme—to smash our campaign in San Sebastian, by arresting Sig Soren for committing adultery!"

"Then you admit the name of your paramour!"

"Well, mother! If you're going to put it in all the newspapers of the United States to-morrow, what's the use of my trying to conceal it?"

VI

Maisie Trent had learned so much in the last eight months—she had told herself that she was a different person, and would be more patient and kind with her "bourgeois" mother. Now, she realized, was the time to keep this resolve. She came back and took a seat on the bed, near her distracted parent.

"Sit down, dear," she began, "and let's talk about it quietly. You should know this much at once: Sig Soren and I are going to be married. His wife has got what is called an interlocutory decree, and under the law he can remarry one year from that date. That means that on the seventh of next July we shall be man and wife—that is, of course, unless someone has him put in jail in the meantime. In that case I shall wait for him. I wouldn't suppose you'd want to make a convict of your future son-in-law."

"They tell me he is already an ex-convict."

"I'm afraid the words won't mean much to you, mother, but going to jail twenty years ago made a humanitarian out of Sig, and started him on his education. For years you tried to get me interested in middle-aged men, and now that I'm going to marry one, you ought not to be so displeased!"

"Don't mock at me, Maisie!"

"Let me tell you the facts about this 'seduction'; the story I shall tell to the jury the day Sig Soren is in the dock: Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I am free, white, and twenty-one, and nobody seduced me. I knew exactly what I was doing, and took three months to think it over. It was really I who seduced Sig. He is very shy and conscientious, and thought he was too old to be in love with me. There was another woman—a rich woman, who was in love with him—at least I thought she was, and I was scared to death for fear she'd persuade him to marry her."

Maisie's mother had not changed in the past eight months, and it was not so easy for her to be patient. "I suppose," she burst in, "it never occurred to you that he might be scheming to marry her, on account of all her money?"

Maisie stared. "So you know about her?"

"I have learned a lot about this wonderful ex-convict of yours."

Maisie's mental horizon was illuminated as if by a lightning flash. "Oh! So that's it! You've enlisted in the war on the Reds! And you've been told how Sig was plotting to get Mabel Saugus's money! Is that so?"

"Yes, that is so."

"Then I know all about it! You've had a visit from Len Saugus! Is that what happened?"

Mrs. Trent sat biting her lip. She had not meant to tell, and was annoyed that she had gone too far.

"That poor psychopathic wretch! I suppose he came to see you—to persuade you to scandalize your own daughter, in order to help him and his big business racketeers defeat the EPIC movement! Oh, mother, who could have dreamed that you would play a part in a melodrama!"

Maisie began to laugh—rather hysterically, to be sure. "Your looks betray your guilt, dear! What did Len do? Did he drive you to San Sebastian? And filling you with horror stories all the way! Did he tell you about the millions who have starved to death in 'Roossia'? Did he tell you that Sig is a 'Commoonist' and a secret agent of Moscow? Has he found out that Sig had some money in the bank at the start of the campaign—and that Stalin had sent it to him? Or did he tell you how Sig earned it—by carrying Christmas trees out of the mountains on his back last winter? Oh, mother, what a pitiful thing, that those scoundrels should cause you all this unhappiness!"

"You're very clever, Maisie; but you'll never get me to believe that Mr. Saugus is a scoundrel."

"I didn't mean that. He's a poor dub who is being used by scoundrels. You imagine my paramour, as you call him, trying to get Mabel Saugus's money—can't you imagine a lot of men who make a racket out of patriotism, frightening a poor, ignorant ranch hand into paying them money to save himself from the Reds? It's one of the biggest rackets of this

hour. Did they get you to promise a contribution to the Better America Federation?"

Again Mrs. Trent kept refuge in silence.

"Mother," said Maisie, "I could go on getting mad, but I'm just sorry about it. I know you really have love for me in your heart, and it's cruel for you to suffer about nothing!"

"You call it nothing that you are living in adultery?"

"I will tell you all about it, mother, and do my best to satisfy you. But first tell me, please, has this scandal got into the hands of the politicians?"

"The district attorney knows about it—if that is what you call a politician."

"There is no more unscrupulous one in the state; and we have to deal with him in a hurry."

VII

Maisie went to the telephone and gave a number. Presently she was asking, "Is this Mabel Saugus? This is Maisie Trent. Mabel, do you happen to be busy this evening? I am calling because an emergency has arisen; there is a move of the politicians to destroy Sig, and with him the EPIC movement. I mustn't talk about it over the phone, but your brother is involved, and your advice is needed. Could you come to the El Capitán right away? Yes, please. Room six-two-seven—make note of it."

"Maisie!" cried Mrs. Trent. "I won't meet that woman!"

"But, mother dear, you are going to combat the Reds. And how can you do it if you don't know them? Take it as a patriotic duty. Even Len Saugus would approve of that!"

Mrs. Trent sank back in her chair, and the girl turned to the phone again, and gave another number.

"Is this Dr. Cass?" said she. "This is Maisie Trent. Doc, you may recall that I took you into my confidence some time back, and you were kind enough to give me advice. Now, there's a serious emergency, which involves the EPIC movement and the co-op. Something may have to be done to-night, and I think you ought to drop everything and come help us. Yes, please, doc. Come to the El Capitán, room six-two-seven, as fast as you can make it."

Then another number, and Maisie, very businesslike, was

saying: "Is Sig there? Where is he? Is Corrigan there?" Then, after a moment: "Pat, this is Maisie. There's an emergency, something very serious, and I have to get hold of Sig. Won't you please hustle round to Eagles' Hall and get him—you make his speech for him, and tell him to come to room six-two-seven, in the El Capitán. Take a taxi if you haven't a car—don't lose a minute, please."

Again Maisie hung up; and her mother said: "My child, I can't endure to meet that man."

"Dear soul!" said Maisie. "It's too bad you have to take it all at once, but it's not my doing, it's your friend, Len Saugus, you have to thank. Sig was a sailor and a miner, and you're not very familiar with those classes; but he's going to be your son-in-law, and in course of time he'll be governor or senator or something, and then you'll be proud of him. Try not to think about his grammar, but about his mind."

"Maisie, I could stand anything, if he was an honest man."

"Well, mother, I know him as I've never known any other man, and never expect to. He's so honest that he's funny. He's so honest that some day his mother-in-law will be greatly irritated by it."

"Tell me the truth. Is he a Communist?"

"The reason he couldn't get along with his wife is that she's a Communist party member, and so is her father, and they couldn't keep from arguing—just like you and me, mother. Sig is a pacifist, he makes a religion out of not hurting any human being. He'll be kind to you, no matter what you do or say. But I hope you'll be polite, and try to learn something about my friends and their purposes."

"Maisie," said Mrs. Trent, sternly, "if you think I am going to be lured into condoning this shameless conduct——"

"Now, mother, don't get all steamed up again. Here's exactly what happened: I asked Sig to marry me, and persuaded him to say yes. He was afraid even to kiss me. It's rather difficult, anyhow, because if he hugs me, he's liable to break my ribs. Well, I went off and thought it over. This was last April, and I counted the months—fifteen of them. I said: I have met the man I love, and he loves me. It is passion, but also it is understanding and sympathy, and a cause to work for. I said: Life isn't so long, and am I willing to throw away fifteen months of happiness?"

"You don't count your religion at all?"

"Oh, yes, I thought of that. I said: Somebody is going to say some words over our love, and that will make the difference between indecency and matrimony. It may be a preacher, and again it may be a justice of the peace, with a wad of tobacco in his cheek. I said: Is it those words we care about, or is it the words that Sig and I have already said to each other? So I went to my lover and said: There's no sense in it; we're going to live together. And we did."

"Maisie, I never heard of such a thing in all my life! "

"Didn't you really, mother? Of course it makes a lot of difference what you believe about such things. In your day a lot of girls starved themselves—but not all, I imagine. The fact that modern girls know about birth control, or know where they can find out, makes a difference. Anyhow, our friends know about our love, and they respect it, and we are happy—and we're not going to let the dirty political crooks break us up. I don't believe my mother will help them—not after she knows the circumstances."

Of course, if Maisie had been telling her mother that she was going to live in sin, the devoted and proper mother would have had hysterics, or done whatever else was necessary. But Maisie was saying that it had already been done, and what was the use of putting it on the front pages of the newspapers? The mere fact that she was here, and seemed her normal self, showing no sign of being debauched, or having taken to drink, or even of having starved on twenty-five dollars a month—that fact was bound to count with any mother. The power of what they call the "*fait accompli*" is recognized by all diplomatists.

VIII

Maisie's friends came; first the young doctor, who was used to emergency calls, and did not have to stop to change his dress or powder his nose. John Cass was as if built for the purpose of reassuring a "*bourgeois*" mother; he had the looks, he had the clothes, the manner, and the conversation. Really, if such an obviously proper person as this had given her daughter advice, and had sanctioned her strange and a terrifying matrimonial choice——

And then Miss Saugus, who had been brought up on a ranch, and had come into a pile of money, and was supposed to have been in love with the ex-sailor and miner, and to have

had him snatched away by Maisie. The first thought which came to Mrs. Trent was that Maisie was presuming a great deal in asking Miss Saugus for help under such circumstances. But apparently these people thought more about their causes than they did about themselves; or else they took their love affairs less seriously—Mrs. Trent didn't know which, and couldn't be sure whether it was a vice or a virtue.

This Miss Saugus betrayed her plebeian origin, like her brother; but she was obviously a kind person, and not easy to dislike. If she also approved the ex-convict, and gave her sanction to his way of life——

Then came the terrible man himself. Of course a mother's first reaction was one of dismay, that her daughter should have chosen a man of such build. But then, he did really seem to have a kind face—a funny, warm smile, and a good voice—yes, you could see that he might be attractive to women. He was obviously very much rattled, thus suddenly confronted with his future mother-in-law. He blushed furiously every time he looked at her, and Mrs. Trent found herself thinking: "Maisie has twisted him around her finger."

The daughter explained to these friends how Len Saugus had come to Mrs. Trent with the news that the district attorney was thinking of having Sig Soren indicted for living in adultery. Maisie told how Len had proposed to her mother to aid the proceedings, but she didn't say that her mother had been thinking of complying; she tactfully left it to be assumed that the mother had come to give warning of the plot. Whatever the company may have known about Mrs. Trent, they politely pretended to consider her an enlightened person like themselves.

The nature of this political plot was apparent to them without explanation, and they discussed measures to deal with it promptly. Mabel said she could do nothing with her brother—they just had to face the fact that he was unbalanced. Dr. Cass said they would have to find a way to put pressure on Bob Stone, the district attorney. They all seemed certain that this official was a racketeer, taking money to exempt criminals from prosecution. They would not bribe him, but they would try to frighten him, and the question was, whose aid they should enlist.

In the course of that conference Mrs. Trent heard shocking things about the fair city of San Sebastian. Dr. Cass knew all the "smart set," and it appeared that living in open adultery

was by no means unknown in the very highest circles. These people would be much discommoded by revival of that old forgotten statute, so it ought to be easy to get some of them to call up the D.A. and tell him to "lay off." Maisie, the "fightingest" one in the company, proposed to go and see some of these people herself; at which Dr. Cass laughed merrily, and said there were more discreet ways of handling such matters. "Ask your mother!" said he—with a smile to the mother.

IX

The talk came to centre upon a certain Mr. Theophilus Fleming, who, Mrs. Trent learned, was a rich and important person in their city. This Mr. Fleming had helped the co-operative, and was an admirer of Mrs. Trent's future son-in-law—in spite of his having gone over to working for EPIC. One word from "Old Thee" to Bob Stone ought to end this dirty business.

Dr. Cass added that Old Thee could hardly refuse to speak that word, since he had at least one case of open breach of the law right in his own family. His daughter, Mrs. Genevieve Whiteing, had been quarrelling for years with her stockbroker husband, and recently they had parted, and Genevieve had set up a residence in Nevada, and meanwhile was travelling about with that painter chap, Barry Rogers, who had won some sort of prize at an exhibition in New York. Freddie Whiteing had also found a new lady, and often stayed in her home. That kind of thing was going on all the time, and the idea of sending anybody to jail for it would make a theme for jesting in the country clubs.

"The doc" said he wouldn't approach Thee Fleming that night, because he was getting rather feeble and went to bed early. But Cass would get hold of him in the morning. It was funny—the old boy had struck up an acquaintance with a lot of the fellows in the co-op, and liked to stop by and watch them working. He would telephone and find out where the dragsaw crew was to be, and he would get out of his car and sit on a log and watch them for hours, and sometimes tell them how to do it. "He's always glad to have company," said Cass, "and I'll arrange for someone to take my place at the hospital to-morrow, and offer to drive with him. I feel pretty sure I can fix it up."

There remained the question of Sig in the meantime. No one could tell what those political crooks might be plotting; and if they should grab him to-night and spring the story in the morning papers, all would be lost. Sig declared that he didn't want to hide, and wouldn't be kept away from his work; but Mabel Saugus said his friends ought to have something to say about that, and they all agreed that he should disappear until the trouble had been averted.

"Let me make a suggestion," said the nice Miss Saugus—she really was "nice," Maisie's mother was being forced to admit. "Mrs. Trent ought to see something of our part of the country, so suppose I take her and Maisie and Sig for a drive to-morrow. We can have lunch somewhere, and in the afternoon we can phone and make sure everything is all right."

"Oh, that's awfully kind of you!" said Maisie. "Mother will love that, I am sure; and it will give her a chance to get acquainted with Sig." This, of course, with a perfectly straight face!

"Sig had better come and spend the night at my house," added Mabel. "They won't look for him there, and my brother won't want him arrested there. And you, Mrs. Trent—it might be a good idea, under the circumstances, if there was a chaperon in the house. I would love to have you as my guest while you are staying here. Won't you and Maisie come? I have plenty of room."

"Oh really, that's too kind of you, Mabel!" exclaimed Maisie. And what could a "bourgeois" mother say? It wasn't an ordinary invitation, it was an appeal in the interest of the proprieties! Before Mrs. Trent had time to think up a polite objection, Sig and the doctor were picking up her bags and escorting her to the elevator.

Maisie paid her bill—and being now a competent young businesswoman, she saw to it that the hotel charged only the "day rate." Presently Mrs. Trent found herself ensconced in a comfortable limousine, with her daughter and her future son-in-law and the future son-in-law's former would-be sweetheart—at least so gossip had it. She made the discovery, as many a bourgeois person has done from time to time, that it is comparatively easy to forgive radicalism when the radical has a lovely home and a comfortable car. Most fortunate that all the radicals haven't such aids to propaganda at their disposal!

X

Mr. Robert P. Stone, district attorney of San Sebastian county, did not raid the home of Mabel Saugus that night. If he had done so, he would have found Maisie Trent sleeping peacefully in bed with her mother. If he had come in the early morning, he would have found Maisie lying awake, watching her sleeping parent and grinning broadly; for surely this was one of the queerest pranks a radical daughter ever played upon a mother who boasted of aristocratic Southern ancestry, and refined upbringing, and lifelong devotion to the doctrines and precepts of the Protestant Episcopal Church!

When this bewildered parent opened her eyes, Maisie set to work at once to keep her mind occupied, gossiping with her about the strange situation she would find in this household. Jennie Gideon, the servant, was a Socialist like her mistress, and was treated as a friend; she had had her heart set upon making a match between Mabel and Sig. Maisie knew all about it, because Sig had told her the story—how Jennie had proposed to him for Mabel, and had said if he married Maisie, Jennie would never have any use for him again. Now, when he came to the house, Jennie kept her nose high in the air, and no longer heaped Sig's plate with double portions.

Naturally, that gave a mother something to occupy her thoughts. Of all the impertinence! What did this Socialist servant find wrong with the daughter of Virginia Beverly Trent? Maisie had to explain that she looked kind of gay and flighty; it was easy to understand just now, when she was so happy that she could not walk across the floor of Mabel's guest-room without dancing, and she was singing all the time she was in the bathtub. It is possible to get your own way by fighting your mother, but it is ever so much nicer to do it by getting your mother into a comical predicament!

Mrs. Trent's dignity required that she should keep her flag flying. "Maisie," she declared, "I wish you to understand that I am not sanctioning——"

Maisie began to laugh. She laughed all the way up the chromatic scale and down again. She rushed to her mother, who was seated at the dressing-table, and began to kiss off all the powder. "I won't dare to be too happy after I go downstairs," she said. "I have to be reserved, for fear of seeming unkind to Mabel."

"I must say it is very sweet of her to take it as she does," admitted Mrs. Trent.

"They don't make women any finer. Jennie has got a new dream for her now, and we're all pitching in to root for it. There's a young Federal administrator who came out here a couple of months ago, Herbert Alding; he's awfully nice, and it doesn't do any harm that his father is enormously rich. He's the man who has the say as to government grants to the co-op; and he's come here several times to consult with us, and always shows a great deal of deference to Mabel's opinions. So Jennie has got it fixed up that 'Prince Herbert,' as they call him, is to be the lucky bridegroom. She gives him the heaping plates at dinner—though that doesn't do much good, since he's rather delicate, and doesn't eat much."

"I declare," said Mrs. Trent, "I never heard of anything so crazy—having your servant act as your match-maker."

"Well," answered Maisie, "I assure you Jennie has a mind of her own. Lenin said that every serving-maid should be able to manage the state."

That was rather a *faux pas*—to mention Lenin! So Maisie had to sing some more, and laugh up and down the chromatic scale. Then she had to compose her features and go downstairs with her mother, and greet Mabel and Sig, and introduce her mother to "Comrade Jennie." All through the breakfast of grapefruit and toast and bacon and eggs and coffee, Mrs. Trent was stealing glances at this rather stern-faced serving-maid, who was secretly preparing a Bolshevik revolution in which she would take charge of the state of California.

Poor Mrs. Virginia! So many strange things were happening, her mind was all in confusion. She was in this lovely home, having a nice breakfast, served in a quite conventional way; she was chatting with people who seemed so polite and friendly—and then suddenly would come a remark like Maisie's about Lenin, and the mother would remember the terrible things that Len Saugus had told her, and would realize that she was falling into the trap of Bolshevik propaganda! She would be listening to Sig Soren telling funny stories about the working-people in the co-op; and suddenly he would make a slip in his speech—he would say: "Yes, it's hard for we workers to understand——" and it would flash across Mrs. Trent's mind that this man was an ex-convict, and that he was.

living in sin with her daughter. And here she was sitting at the breakfast-table with him—she had weakly permitted herself to be picked up and brought here, to act as a “chaperon,” a false and faithless one, condoning and concealing this offence against God and man!

It was that way all through the drive they took. They looked at beautiful scenery of mountains and forests and ocean; and Mrs. Trent was put into the back seat with her future son-in-law, and his tongue was loosened, and he told stories of adventure as a sailor and miner and gold prospector in Alaska. He even told about being in jail, and how many times he had escaped and lived with the Indians!

Presently he was talking about the EPIC movement, the thing nearest to his heart. Discovering that his future mother-in-law didn't have a very clear idea of it, he favoured her with as much eloquence as would have sufficed for a large audience. He explained the idea of letting the workers produce their own food and clothing, instead of having the state give it to them as a dole. He explained the difference between production for use for the unemployed, which was the EPIC programme, and production for use for everybody, which was the Socialist programme—and of course much harder to get. He explained how the Communists wanted to reach the goal by overthrow and dictatorship, whereas the EPICS and Socialists agreed in relying upon democratic consent.

It all sounded so clear and reasonable, as this polite and well-informed man explained it, that Mrs. Trent found her hostility melting. But suddenly she would be seized by a panic, remembering the warnings of Len Saugus, about the seductiveness of these “Commoonists,” and how skilful they were in worming their way into your confidence!

XI

Meantime, Dr. John Cass was exercising the same insidious arts upon the president of the Golden State Light and Power Company. “Old Thee” was getting older every day, and his medical advisers were insisting that he should drop the helm of business and get out into the sunshine and fresh air; and of course nothing could be more harmless than for him to sit on a log and watch a gang of men with a power saw cut

down dead trees and turn them into firewood.

The old gentleman would have liked nothing better than to put on blue jeans or khaki and lend a hand now and then; but of course that wouldn't have been dignified, people would have said he was in his dotage—especially his fashionable wife and daughters would have said it. He couldn't even enjoy work on his own place, because there were men employed for each task, and they wouldn't care to have their routine interfered with.

But these fellows of the co-op—they were free men, as Old Thee himself had been fifty years back; they laughed and made jokes, and treated the old gentleman not as a boss, but as an honoured guest. They were working for themselves, and getting the product, so no slave driver was needed—and just let anybody try to "soldier" on the job! They were helping each other, and the old ones were teaching the young ones, who had had no chance to learn to work since the depression began.

When it was time for lunch, then they had a little fun. That fellow Cristy Jett would get out his banjo, without which he never went anywhere, and would sing about the "Dying Cowboy," or perhaps the "Arkansaw Traveller." That was the kind of songs that Theophilus Fleming had enjoyed when he was a boy, and in his secret heart he liked it better than all the racket and confusion of the symphony orchestra, which his wife supported, and to which she tried in vain to drag him.

So there was Thee sitting on a log and listening to the music of the saw, when young Cass broke to him the tidings that Len Saugus, that poor dunderhead, was trying to persuade the district attorney of San Sebastian County to indict Sig Soren because he was living with a girl whom he intended to marry as soon as his divorce was made final. At first Thee wouldn't believe it—he insisted there couldn't be such a law. But Cass had asked a lawyer friend and made sure it was so; and then Thee became more noisy than the dragsaw.

"Why, man, that's the craziest proposition I ever heard of! Where would they stop if they once started such a racket? Think what the blackmailers would do to us!" Old Thee didn't name his own fair daughter—but he must have been thinking of her, and known that Cass was thinking of her also.

"That's a good fellow, that Sig Soren," Thee declared. "I was sorry to see him go into this damned EPIC business,

and I told him he couldn't expect any more support from me. But if Bob Stone wants to fight a man's politics, let him use political weapons—show people how that EPIC scheme is crack-brained, and how it would wreck the state. But the idea of trying to send a man to jail because he's got a girl! What sort of a girl is she? "

Cass said she was a very nice girl, who came of an old Virginia family, and the mother had come to town last night, much distressed about the matter, and had appealed to Cass for help. Old Thee said it was a damned outrage, and he got up, and walked with the doctor to a nearby ranch-house, where he asked permission to use the telephone.

A minute or two later, there he was roaring at Bob Stone. in a tone of voice that must have made that venal official's ears burn. "What the hell is that about your getting after Sig Soren on a morals charge? What has become of your political judgment? You'll not only make a martyr out of him, you'll make our town the laughing-stock of the country, and bring the blackmailers swarming here from all over the world. Good God, man, that's the worst fool proposition I ever heard in all my life. Don't you know anything about what our first families are doing? There's hardly one that wouldn't quake in their boots when they read that story. You might want to have a woman yourself some day, and then where would you be? "

The doctor couldn't hear what the district attorney was answering, but evidently he made haste to back water; for Thee said: "I'm glad to hear that. I didn't want to think you'd lost your senses. You know I helped to put you in office, and I'd hate to see you stick your foot into a mess like that."

Old Thee hung up the receiver. "I guess you won't hear any more about the law against adultery." Then, as they were strolling back to the working crew, the old gentleman added: "What's all this talk about Socialists being free lovers? Is there anything to it, Cass? "

BOOK IV: 1935

CHAPTER XIII

MASS ACTION

I

THE sheriff's men came secretly, two carloads of them, for they had a big job to do. They went right to it, starting on one of the two-party houses of the tract; knocking on both doors, sticking their feet inside, and shoving the women out of the way. They laid hold of the first pieces of furniture they saw, and started carrying them out to the sidewalk.

Pandemonium broke loose in a moment. Mrs. O'Brien was Irish, and she started screaming in the name of all the saints. Mrs. Lashevich, in the other half, was Jewish, and in the past she had not got on so well with her neighbour, but now their cause was one, and Mrs. Lashevich's "Oi! oi!" was loud enough to reach the throne of Jehovah. The neighbours came running, the women shrieking with rage, the children crying, the dogs barking.

That was the regular thing, and the sheriff's men paid no attention to it. Three dollars a day in cash they got, and dollars were scarce these days, and maybe they had interest on their own mortgages to pay. They would not stop to let anyone put anything in order, they carried out a table with everything on it, they rolled mattresses and bedding together, and if there was a sick man on the bed, they took up the mattress by the four corners and carried him on it to the sidewalk. They dumped the kitchen things into barrels and boxes, and if there were none of these in sight they spread out a sheet or a blanket and piled things into that. In the next house lay a young married woman awaiting the arrival of her first baby. The expected baby went out with the mother quite comfortably on the mattress; and if the baby should start to be born, that would be a matter for the emergency hospital, not the sheriff's office.

The fourteen delinquent mortgagors in the Paradise Park subdivision had known what was coming, and had resolved

to make a fight. The men, being mostly out of work, stayed at home. One of them telephoned to the Homeowners and Tenants Protective Association, an organization which the newspapers referred to as "Communist-dominated." The rest marched forth, and the moment the sheriff's men had finished with the O'Briens and the Lasheviches, they set to work to move the possessions back into the houses.

So that sent the sheriff's men to the telephone, and the riot squad of the police department was more competent and speedy than any bunch of poverty-stricken agitators. Before the Irish and Jewish possessions were half back in the houses, there came a screaming of sirens, and a patrol wagon loaded with cops, and others on motor-cycles, rushing to the scene. Some of the men started to run, others formed in battle array, armed with bed slats, shovels, anything handy. "Stand your ground, fellows!" shouted one; a big fellow with a good voice for shouting, and a baseball bat belonging to one of his kids. To his side rushed a little fellow with a bed slat and a valiant soul. "We might as well go to jail as anywhere!" yelled he.

They stood, a dozen desperate men, and several women armed with rolling pins and pokers. The big fellow aimed a swipe with the bat, and the cop ducked, and another cop swung with his club, and laid the leader flat. The little fellow with the bed slat had it knocked out of his hand and received a glancing blow which opened up the side of his scalp. There was a bedlam of screams and curses, with the sound of blows on heads and bodies; then there were the mortgagors of the Paradise Park Realty Company running in various directions, with the cops chasing them and landing more blows.

The little man with the valiant soul ran as fast as the others, blood trickling down the side of his face and his clothes. He hadn't had any work, or any exercise but walking, for the past year, and food had been scarce, so he was not in good condition, and doubtless the well-fed policeman could have caught him if he had wanted to. But the policy was to make as few arrests as possible in eviction cases; they just broke up the resistance, and stood by until the sheriff's men had completed the job, and the representative of the owner had locked the doors and windows of the houses.

So presently the little man stopped running, and walked instead. He had done a lot of walking—a distance about equal to the earth's diameter—on the sidewalks of California

cities, trying to find some sort of a job. When he began to feel faint, he sat on a kerb, and tore off one sleeve of his shirt, and tied it around his head to stop the oozing of blood. Then he sat for a while longer, looking back over the last twenty years of his life.

II

Lawrence T. Peck was thirty-seven, but appeared much older, for the reason that his hair had begun to turn grey and to fall out on top, and he had many lines of worry. He was thin, and the bones of his face stood out; but they were good bones, a prominent forehead with room for brains, a hawk-like nose, a pair of tight-set lips and a determined chin. He was smooth-shaven, and had been clean before the fracas with the police.

Twenty years ago Larry Peck had begun work as a garage mechanic. He had saved his money, and started a place of his own, and made a success. He bought a comfortable home and paid for it. ("Own your own home," the California moralists taught.) He had invested ten thousand dollars in the stock of a mortgage loan company. ("One hundred per cent security," the advertisement of the company had said.) He had two thousand dollars cash in the bank; and in the summer of 1929, having more work than he could attend to, he borrowed more money from the bank and started to enlarge his garage. ("The boom has just begun," said the newspapers.)

The mortgage company failed, and its stock became worthless. The garage customers fell off, or delayed to pay their bills. The bank renewed the notes several times, but in the end Larry was forced to close out his business. He sold his comfortable home, and moved into a cheap one in Paradise Park, a suburban slum, and set out to tramp the streets looking for work.

Then, in desperation, he went to the CWA and they gave him one of those jobs digging a trench with half a shovel. He worked at that a few months—until there was a change of policy, and they dropped the CWA, and told him to apply to a new set of initials, the SERA. After a month or two of delay, and much winding of red tape, they told him he was ineligible for work, but would get relief. That sounded like charity to Larry Peck, and he had prejudices derived

from New England ancestry. He wanted work.

When his last dollar had gone, he borrowed money on his cheap home. Now the money was gone, and the home was gone, and his wife and three children were presumably sitting on a mattress on the sidewalk, weeping and wondering where to go. He thought about them with less anguish of soul than one might have expected; for Mrs. Larry had been clamouring that the family should enrol and take their share of relief. She had nagged about it incessantly; Larry had a right to starve himself if he wanted to, but surely not his wife and children.

Now Larry sat on the kerb edge and said: "Let them take it; but not me." A mother and children would not be left on the sidewalk indefinitely; the charity people would take charge of the case, and find them a room to stay in, and put up ten dollars a month for it. They would allow four or five dollars a week, or credit at the grocery store; and the relief ladies would come and say: "Now, Mrs. Peck, you must realize that oatmeal is cheaper, and cabbage is a very nutritious vegetable, only one cent a pound. You must learn also that the cheaper cuts of meat are exactly as nutritious as the best, and can be made tender by long boiling, or by pounding with a hammer."

"All right," thought Larry, "that's for them." And for himself, was he to go out into the country and find a job, in competition with Mexicans and Filipinos, earning ten cents an hour picking fruit? Or would he find shelter in one of the transient camps, where they would give him a bed and a blanket, and three meals a day, and wood to chop or baskets to weave? They would tell him when to go to bed and when to get up and what he could talk about. "Not for me!" said Larry.

He walked some more, slowly and carefully. He was rather messy with his own blood, and a shirt sleeve tied around his head; people stared at him as they passed—but they passed. Larry had come to a leisure-class neighbourhood where people were especially willing to let you pass. He walked aimlessly, then sat and rested, then walked again—until the blessed darkness came, and he was no longer an offence in people's sight.

He was passing an alley, and saw a car drive in just ahead of him. There was, in the alley, a row of half a dozen garages,

belonging to an apartment house, and the car turned into one of these. Larry, having an idea in his mind, stopped and strolled back, crossing the alley again, and heard the man roll the garage door shut, and come out by a side door, and go into the apartment building. Larry strolled on down the street for a while, making up his mind. Then he came back. This time he did not cross the alley, but turned in, and went to the little side door of the garage and examined the lock.

It was one of those cheap locks that landlords put on rented buildings. Larry had the keys to his own home—all he had left of it; he tried them, and one of them opened the door. He went in and locked the door behind him. He turned on the lights of the car, and seeing a board in a corner of the garage, he slipped that under the knob of the door, so as to make it still harder for anyone to get in.

Larry knew all about cars. It did not take him long to find a piece of wire and run it around the ignition lock. The fact that the steering wheel was also locked didn't make any difference, because Larry didn't intend to do any steering. He started the engine, and set the gas lever so that it would run at moderate speed, not too noisy. Then he opened all the doors of the car and got into the back seat. He was feeling tired now, and rather faint; so it was pleasant to lie down on that soft cushion and have a rest.

III

The telephone rang, and the man in the apartment answered. "Yes, this is Dr. Price," said he, and listened. "All right," he added. "Keep her quiet, and I'll come right over." He had started to undress, but put on his clothes again, and took his black bag, and went downstairs and out to the garage.

When he got near he stopped and listened in surprise. The engine was running; and he thought: "Surely I couldn't have been that crazy!" He had never done such a thing in his life.

He unlocked the door; but it would not open. He shoved hard. Then he stopped and thought. Somebody had shut himself up in that place and started the engine. The doctor knew all about carbon monoxide, and he had only one thought: "A suicide!"

He threw himself against the door with his shoulder several

times, and broke it off the hinges. He saw a blue-grey haze inside, and the door of the car open. Holding his breath, he ran to the big door of the garage, which was fastened on the inside, and rolled it back. He went out and took a few breaths of air, and ran in again, grabbed the body of the man in the car, and dragged him out to the air.

The body was still warm, but the heartbeat was feeble, and the doctor saw that it was a case for a pulmotor. He laid the man out of the way, and drove the car out into the alley. With the doors and the front ventilator open, it wouldn't take long to change the air, so he put the man on the back seat again, and drove out to the street. As soon as he thought it safe he closed the doors of the car, but left the windows open, and drove as fast as possible to the hospital.

IV

So it happened that when Larry Peck became conscious again, he was lying on a table, with some kind of apparatus clamped over his head, and a machine pumping oxygen into his lungs every few seconds. He couldn't absorb very much of the oxygen, because the carbon monoxide had injured his red blood corpuscles. So Larry had only a vague sense of what was happening, and the main thing he knew was that he had a splitting headache, and wished they would let him alone.

Later he became conscious of lying in a bed between clean white sheets, with a young lady in a white dress and cap standing by him. He still had the headache, but was able to recall what had happened now. His thought was: "Oh, hell! I got it to do all over again!"

He had plenty of time to think. At first he had nothing but resentment. Why had they had to meddle in his affairs? But later, as the worst of the headache passed, came curiosity. "Why, I was dead!" thought Larry Peck. "And now I have come back to life again! Being dead is nothing at all."

Presently it was morning, and there came a doctor, a handsome young fellow with a little black moustache and white duck suit. "Well, here we are!" said he, with his bedside manner.

"You did me no favour," said Larry.

"It wasn't I. It was Dr. Price."

"Well, why couldn't he let me alone?"

"You feel that way now," said the other. "But you'll change your mind later on."

"I've got no work, I've got nothing to live for," replied Larry, in a dull voice.

"Well, maybe we can help you find something. Providence must have some use to make of you, because you broke into a doctor's garage, and he had a telephone call a few minutes later."

"Damn!" said Larry; and no more.

Later in the morning came his wife. They had identified the victim by a letter in his pocket, and the papers had printed the story. Mrs. Larry wept, and made an emotional scene. She wanted to tell her poor husband that she was sorry for every cross word she had ever spoken, and that she and the children were being taken care of, and they would all start life all over. But Larry didn't care a bit about it.

"I was dead," he said. "I was all right, and out of my trouble, and now I got it all over again. What's the sense bringing a man back to a world that has got no place for him?"

The nurse said that the patient was still very weak, and the wife went away. They fed him broth and orange juice and milk, and then poached eggs on toast and lamb chops—things that poor Larry had almost forgotten. His physical strength came back, and his bandaged head healed, and he was able to sit up and shave himself.

But something had happened to his soul; he would lie for hours and think about this strange idea. "By God, I was dead! And there was nothing to it at all! Why does a man have to be afraid to be dead?" Then he would think: "What's the importance of being alive, if you got to be dead later on?"

Dr. John Cass, the intern, sat on the edge of the bed and had a talk with this patient. "Mr. Peck," said he, "they tell me you got discouraged because you were out of work. Is that so?"

"I lost my business," replied Larry, "and I won't take charity."

"That's a fine spirit, and I admire you for it. But you don't have to give up just yet. Did you ever hear of the Self-Help Exchange in this city?"

"Seems to me I did, but I don't remember about it."

"Well, it's one of the producers' co-operatives. A man can go in there and work for himself, and for a group of others at the same time. They are building a great institution."

"What do you get out of it?"

"You get whatever you produce. They have about twelve hundred members, and they do all sorts of work. They grow vegetables, cut firewood, make clothes, bake bread, run a restaurant. I belong to the medical section—helped to start it, and some twenty-five doctors and dentists give their help. Now we get our share of goods and services. You ought to look into it, Mr. Peck."

"I will, doc. But I've found so many ways of getting gyped in this world."

"This is the people themselves running their own affairs, and you get just what you produce, no more and no less. I felt just as you do until I had looked into it; then I had to revise all my thinking about economics."

"I can't say I ever did much thinking about economics myself," admitted Larry. "I was too full of my own business."

"What was it?"

"I ran a garage. I began as a mechanic."

"Well, you're the sort of man they need in the co-op. They've got some fifty trucks and vehicles now, and they always have use for a trustworthy mechanic. Go and see them."

"All right, doc. Thanks." But Larry's voice was dull, and he didn't really have any hope. He had made up his mind that he wasn't ever again going to let life fool him with hopes. "I was dead once," he kept thinking, "and they should have left me."

V

When he was discharged from the hospital, Larry went back to his family. The attempted suicide and publicity had had quick results; the relief people had established Mrs. Peck and her three children in a two-room cottage on the rear of a lot, and were paying twelve dollars a month for it, and some of the furniture had been installed. There was a cot for Larry, and some of the bread of charity, and he ate it. They had broken him at last.

In his pocket he had the address of the co-op, which he had promised Dr. Cass he would visit. He went there, and was

interviewed by one of the personnel officers. Said this man: "You have been an employer, and have set a value on your time. Are you willing now to be paid the same as all the others?"

Larry answered: "I am down to the bottom. I have no claims at all."

He was accepted as a member, and put to work in the garage. It was a big place, with a lot of cars in it, and they told him that as a member, he owned a share of it; but that didn't seem like much to a man who had owned a whole garage. He saw a lot of work to be done, and he did it; and when the others found that he did it right, they gave him more.

They told him that he was getting points for this work. They gave him a card with credits on it, and presently he drifted around to the commissary to see what he could get for these points. Everybody did the same thing at the same hour—when they finished work; so the place was crowded, like a department store on bargain day. It was springtime, and there were a few early vegetables, and Larry took home an armful. They were making shirts, and his own had been patched enough times, so he bought a couple of those; a pair of cheap sandals for one of the kids—various things that he could use. He learned that he could get a daily paper delivered at his home, and that was something he had missed for the last couple of years. Other things were listed on the bulletin board, but he did not want to study art, or learn to play the xylophone.

It had been explained to Larry that he and his family would not be able to live out of the commissary. The co-op had been going two years and a half, but had not been able to achieve that for its members. They would have to go on taking relief; but they could "supplement" what they got—and with only forty dollars a month and their rent, they could use plenty of supplementing!

Anyhow, Larry found that working was a lot better than sitting around in despair. Work not only toned up his muscles, it restored his mind; it had its effect upon him, even while he resisted it. Even while he told himself that he would never let life fool him again, hope was beginning to burgeon in his heart.

They published a little four-page weekly paper in the co-op,

and this was free to all members. Larry took this home and read it, to try to find out what the whole thing was about. He had been an individualist all his life; not a slave-driver, for he was a kind-hearted man, but he had hired workers, and had told them what to do, and had seen that they did it. That was the way you satisfied your customers, built up a business and paid your debts. When you had done that, you owned the business, and were proud of yourself, and of the country in which you lived; you called that the American way, and you voted the Republican ticket because the Republicans were people who had always believed that way, and had built up the country on those sound principles. If any foreigner didn't like that way and those principles, by God he could go back where he came from.

Now Larry picked up the little paper, the *Pointer*, its pages no bigger than an ordinary sheet of letter paper. On the first page he read this:

"Selfishness does not work in a co-operative. It defeats its own ends. We in this co-operative have come to realize that each can promote his own interest only by promoting the interest of all. It is only by working for one another that we have been able to accomplish what we have. By promoting each other's interest we have developed our organizational structure and our operating sections. Selfish grabbing by individuals would never have accumulated our equipment and machinery. When we know this, we really understand co-operation, and build our system upon solid foundations."

Larry thought this over. He read a little further, a letter from a fellow named Sig Soren, who was living up in a camp in the mountains, getting out a batch of lumber. Someone had asked him to send a message through the *Pointer*, and he wrote:

"My message is, stick to the co-op. You are nearer to success than you have ever been. Come to the meetings. Lay everything on the table. Be fair to one another. Help all your fellow members. Do your work honestly, and have faith in our cause. If you continue in this course, everything that is good and worth while will come to you. My thoughts are with you every moment."

Larry Peck had been brought up in a religious family. His forebears had been preachers in Massachusetts; they had moved, one generation after another, to Ohio, then to Iowa,

then to Utah, and last to California; and always they had carried Bibles. Larry's family had stopped going to church, because they had no decent clothes; but he still had the memories, and something in that letter stirred a memory, and he got out his Bible and looked up the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans, and read:

"Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality."

VI

As a man who had managed labour, Larry Peck was interested to see what difference was made by this new system of love and brotherhood. Labour still had to be managed; but mostly the managing was done by labour itself, with only a hint now and then from the "co-ordinator." It would be discovered that the price of wood had gone up in a certain week, and the members of the wood section would ask: "What's the matter?" The co-ordinator would say: "Well, what were we doing last week that we didn't do before?" Someone would exclaim: "It's that guy Shorty, that keeps chewin' the rag over politics!" They would agree, yes, by heck, that was it; and the next time Shorty would start denouncing Roosevelt and the relief officials, there would be a chorus: "Can it, you! We want to cut wood."

Larry Peck's interest in life came back, and he was transformed from an individualist into a co-operator. He did carefully whatever tasks were assigned to him, and became known as a man who could be trusted. Because of his special knowledge he was asked to test a couple of secondhand trucks which the co-op proposed to buy on a Federal grant. Because of red tape and delay those trucks were sold to other parties; so the money was "re-allocated," and Larry had to examine more trucks. Presently he was checking all repair work in the garage, and was next in line for a seat at the round table.

But then befell a calamity. The authorities in Washington were trying to solve the problem of making work for the unemployed, without any real understanding of the economic

forces causing unemployment, and without being allowed to take any fundamental measures, or even to get exact figures as to the extent of the problem. They would set up a huge organization to manage leaf raking and manicuring of the highways; it would run for a year or so, and then be involved in such a mess of graft and confusion—its authors would be forced to announce that the problem had been solved and the organization was no longer needed. Then in a few months they would start another one, to repeat the blunders all over again.

The President had now established according to law a new corporation known as the Works Progress Administration—WPA—and now after several months it was beginning to function. As part of this functioning, Mr. Lawrence T. Peck of 2247½ N. Redonda St., San Sebastian, registered under the SERA as a garage mechanic, received a mimeographed form letter, instructing him to report at once to the new WPA headquarters, to be assigned to work relief. Larry, puzzled and dismayed, obeyed the order, and was told that WPA was setting up a garage for the trucks which were to carry workmen and tools to the various "projects" it was starting. His compensation under this new system would be forty-eight dollars per month.

This meant, of course, that he was taken away from the Self-Help Exchange. There was nothing he could do about it, for if he refused a work assignment his name would be stricken from the relief rolls, and his family would go back to starving. Larry phoned his section co-ordinator, and told him the bad news, and then went to the new job.

That night there happened to be a general assembly of the co-op; and the misfortune of Larry Peck became a topic of discussion. It was a grave problem the co-oppers were facing, for the relief people were continually weeding out their workers—only this weeding was a reverse process, taking the good plants and leaving the poor ones, the so-called "unemployables." The co-op couldn't even keep its section co-ordinators, unless they happened to have independent incomes. Everybody who developed skill or talent would be pulled away, and either set to digging ditches, or directing others at this sort of work.

Bitter speeches were made to the assembly. The roll was called, a list of members who had been taken against their

will. Thomas Cullen told how he had appealed to the relief administrator, and could get no satisfaction whatever. The WPA people could not discriminate in favour of the co-operatives, they said. "In other words," said Cullen, "with one department they give grants to build us up, and with another they cripple us. It is the same everywhere. One branch of the government slaughters pigs and buries them in trenches, while another buys up surplus food to give to the unemployed."

"They don't do that any more!" called a voice.

"Don't they?" said the ex-manager of a broker's office, laughing. "A nian would have to sit up all night to tabulate the things they have stopped doing, and the new ones they have started."

VII

Up rose Mrs. Jane Pitter, deadliest of all enemies of the relief authorities. This bitter little woman still worked in the clothing section her minimum of six hours a week, so that she might remain a member and be able to voice her ideas.

"They know exactly what they are doing!" cried she. "They have a definite policy—to keep us to a rag-tag and tincan economy. They won't give us permanent equipment; everything has to be second rate, our products have to be perishable, no long-term projects—and what's the reason? They don't want to let us get ahead, they dare not take a chance of our competing with private industry. Nothing to free us from our chains, nothing to break our prison bars! Private business is coming back, and the profiteers are going to have another chance to pick our bones. That's the policy, and that's what's in the mind of every administrator, from these little local bedbugs right up to the White House. But never will they come out and say it—oh, no, they're all liberals and friends of the workingman, and have to get your votes when election time comes round!

"Our co-ordinators tell us that we can't help it, we are at the mercy of these officials who hold the purse strings, Maybe we are, but at least we can know the truth, and not fool ourselves with the idea that our enemies are our friends. At least our leaders can come out frankly, and say: 'Yes, it is true, our co-op is not going to be allowed to grow, and can never achieve an economy of abundance, or solve the problem of

poverty and starvation in the midst of a surplus of everything. Our real workers and skilled people are going to be jerked away, and we're to be left, a thousand or two half-starved and sick people, helpless as a bunch of wet chickens under a wagon. We're going to collect the old rags of the rich and mend and patch 'em; we're going to cut our own firewood, and grow our own tomatoes and can 'em. But we're never going to be able to live out of the commissary, and we'll always be under the thumb of these relief bureaucrats!'

"That's the truth, friends; we struggle and strain, we break our backs and wear our fingers to the bone—but it all means nothing, against one stroke of a bureaucrat's pen! They sit and talk us over, and determine what they call a 'policy.' They sign their names on pieces of paper, and we are allowed to live; they change their policy, and tear up the piece of paper, and the blood is drained out of us, our co-op withers and dies."

It was Charlie Day's rule to let the Communists and all other "kickers" say their full say, and then answer them. He told the people now that he didn't think things were quite as bad as Mrs. Pitter represented them. In the past six months, with the help of Mr. Herbert Alding, a bureaucrat, they had got grants from the Federal government of more than thirty thousand dollars. They had bought five additional trucks, and were working them day and night. They had bought a large tractor, and all knew how that had helped them with their spring planting; in the fall they would see how it helped them pulling stumps and getting firewood. They had got a fine printing press, sold in bankruptcy proceedings by order of a court.

The chairman told them a story about this press. One of the relief officials had been called up by the head of a big printing firm in San Sebastian, who said he had heard a report that the Self-Help Exchange was to get sixty-five thousand dollars from the government to buy printing machinery. The official had laughed and said that the figure sixty was a mistake, it was only five thousand the Exchange was getting. The printer had hung up, and the relief people had heard no more about the matter.

"That shows exactly their attitude," said Charlie. "They won't let us become a big concern and compete them out of business, but they are willing for us to have what they consider

a reasonable plant, to work on a basis of swapping. You all know how we are trading letterheads and circulars for groceries, hardware, all sorts of stuff all over town. It is becoming, next to wood, our best commodity."

"But we can't live out of the commissary!" cried a voice.

"We figure now that we live forty per cent out of the commissary. That's not enough, but it's better than the nothing we had two years and a half ago. We don't want to kid ourselves, but we do want to keep all the facts in mind. The Federal policies change from month to month, and we can never foresee them, but we go right on growing—with their help, or in spite of their opposition."

"What good does it do, if we go on losing our best members?" demanded Mrs. Pitter.

"We don't lose them altogether. We figure that about six thousand persons have so far been through our co-op, and that's five times as many as we have now. But those people haven't forgotten what we taught them, and that ought to count from your point of view, Mrs. Pitter. We're running not merely an industry, but a school of co-operation."

What were they teaching in that school? The excitable little woman got up and made another speech. There would be no life for the working class of America again, until they understood that it was a system of which they were victims, and until they united to overthrow that system, and take possession of the tools of production—the real tools, the basis of big-scale industry—and use them to make comfort and plenty for every human being in America who was willing and able to work. *That* was the doctrine they ought to be teaching in their school of co-operation!

There was a burst of applause when Mrs. Pitter finished, even though she had made the same speech a score of times before. There were some who agreed with her, and more who were coming nearer to agreement. Their EPIC movement had been defeated, and politically they were unanchored, and ready for another voyage. A lot of the old people had taken up the Townsend Plan, attending weekly meetings and shouting for their two hundred dollars a month. Others were talking "third party," and becoming Socialists or Communists without knowing it.

There arose a little man with a sharp, earnest face, and a bald spot with a scar on it. "I am Larry Peck," said he—

"the man you have been arguing about. This is the first time I ever made a speech, and I never expected to. But I feel strongly about having been took away from my work in the garage, and I'm going to take the right of a citizen to say what I think about it. All these ideas are new to me. I was just the ordinary American businessman, and I got my beliefs from my banker, and from the newspaper he financed. But I have seen a light, and I want to tell Mrs. Pitter she is dead right, the American people are living under a robber system, and nobody is going to get them free but themselves.

"My friends, a couple of months ago I had a strange experience. I couldn't see any more hope in life and I tried to kill myself. I was just as good as dead, and it was an accident I got brought back. It taught me something worth while. I learned that it don't hurt to die. It's just going to sleep and staying asleep, and it's a darn sight better than most of the things the poor people of America are standing right now. I for one am never going to be afraid of anything again. I run away from the cops that day when they threw me and my wife and children out of our home, but I ain't going to run again. They can't do any more than kill me; and by God, they've got that to do—I'm not going to oblige them by taking myself out of their way. Before I go I figure to let at least a few of my fellow workers know how it happens that they toil all their lives and get nothing but poverty and public charity and a pauper's grave at the end."

Few of the members of the Self-Help Exchange had ever heard of Larry Peck until that night; but this little speech almost broke up the assembly. There was a storm of applause, and Mrs. Pitter rushed over and shook Larry's hand, and so did her brother, Jake Burrige, and a couple of his friends. The people wanted to hear more from Larry, and the chairman had to pound with his gavel, and remind them that they had a lot of business to transact.

Mrs. Pitter and her friends constituted the "Communist bunch" of the co-op; but Larry had no idea of that. He went off with them and accepted their invitation to sit in a beer parlour and eat a sandwich and drink a glass of beer. He heard their story, and was amazed to find that they had a complete analysis of what was wrong with the present system and what the people ought to do about it. Towards the end of the evening he was nearly bowled over by the discovery that

they were avowed " Reds," and that what he had been hearing and approving was the dread " Communist propaganda "!

VIII

It was a portent in the city of San Sebastian; a simon-pure hundred per cent American businessman made into a Bolshevik—and not by anybody's preachment, but by the logic of events, the working out of economic forces. The primitive Christian teachings of brotherhood and love, exemplified in the Self-Help Exchange, had failed, because big business and its politicians and government administrators would not permit them to succeed; and Lawrence T. Peck, ex-proprietor of the East Side Garage, was a Red. More than that, he was an agitator; one who went about haranguing the American working class, declaring that many of them would have to die in the cause of workers' emancipation, and that they should not be afraid to die, but should concern themselves to sell their lives at the highest price.

Larry Peck had never so much as heard of the theory of surplus value, and could not have told the difference between dialectical materialism and demonic possession. But he knew why the American people were poor, and he knew what poverty did to them. So the " Red " cause in San Sebastian took a sudden leap forward. Under the guidance of his new friends, Larry made more speeches, and discovered that he enjoyed it. Audiences would never cease to be amused by the idea that a man had died, and then had come back to tell them that it didn't hurt, and therefore they didn't need to be afraid of the capitalists, with their machine-guns, clubs, and jails.

The Communists had recently made a change in tactics. Their leaders at home and abroad had learned the lessons so efficiently taught them by Hitler; they didn't want any more Fascism, anywhere in the world. So they no longer spent their time quarrelling with other working-class groups; they no longer denounced everybody who didn't agree with them as a " Social Fascist." They had become humbler, and were eager to co-operate with Socialists, liberals, anybody who was opposed to war and Fascism; they were even joining churches, in their efforts to " bore from within."

So they were not anxious to pin the Communist label on this eager new convert; rather they sought to tone him down

and teach him caution. As a former businessman, a church member, a lodge member, an indubitable hundred percenter, he could talk to such groups, and win many converts, and raise funds for the cause. He would be useful on delegations which represented the unemployed, in making miserable the lives of relief officials, and wringing from them a few more concessions.

The holders of wealth and privilege were raging at the Roosevelt administration, denouncing extravagance, and demanding the balancing of the budget. With elections only a little more than a year away, the administration would get in a panic, and start to retrench in the only way that was safe—by taking a little more from the poor. So there was an incessant war on the part of the unemployed to keep what they had and clamour for more. And always the Communists were in the forefront of this agitation; if they were not, the newspapers made it appear that they were, which served the same purpose: of making the unemployed believe that the Communists were their only real friends, the ones who were willing to risk beatings and imprisonment in the cause of the oppressed.

There was a fresh burst of activity on the part of the unemployed. More meetings were called, more speeches made, and more committees appointed to wait upon relief officials with lists of grievances and demands. Always it was urged that the unemployed themselves should attend all sessions; "mass action" was the Communist password. So the hungry and impatient people would crowd into the relief offices and refuse to be dismissed. They would clamour and shout, shake their fists and wave their arms; the police would be called—whereupon the demonstrators would run away and live to demonstrate another day. There would be scare stories in the newspapers, and the worried officials would send long telegrams to Washington, telling how discontent was getting out of hand, and some concessions would have to be made. The concessions would be made; and then in the meetings of the unemployed the Communists would shout: "You see? That's the way to do it! They care nothing about your sufferings, but frighten them and they give up."

IX

Larry Peck still worked at his garage job in the daytime, and went to his home to sleep. But his home was not so good

any more, because his wife had heard about his new activities, and took to nagging and scolding again; she took it as the blackest of disgraces that her husband should be named as a Red. Larry tried to explain to her what it was all about, but politics meant nothing to her, she only knew what she read in the papers, and what her neighbours said after they had read it in the papers. She continued to shed tears and make his life a burden.

So Larry stopped going to his home. He told his wife that he was going to throw up his WPA job and leave town, and she could apply to the county relief people and get herself and children listed for the dole. Whatever new rackets might be invented by the relief bureaucrats, they could not get out of taking care of a deserted wife and children.

So Larry Peck became what the papers called a "professional agitator"; when he spoke at meetings his comrades took up a collection, and allowed him a dollar a day to live on. He gave all his time to organizing work, committee meetings, reports, and whatnot. When he had time to spare, he would put in a few hours at the co-op garage; so long as he earned six hundred points per week, he was a member in good standing, and could continue the practice of "boring from within."

Larry stayed with various comrades who had a corner to spare; and presently this problem also solved itself. Mrs. Jane Pittier had divorced her drunken husband, and now she listened to Larry's speeches and he listened to hers, and they found approval in each other's hearing. So presently Larry was staying in Mrs. Jane's lodgings, violating the law—but this time Mr. Len Saugus didn't hear about it, and Bob Stone, the district attorney, took no action. A divorce would have cost a lot of money and trouble, and what difference did it make? Larry was already so red in his wife's eyes that a scarlet letter would have been invisible on him. Now and then he would pay a visit to his family, and take a package of food or clothing out of the co-op commissary for the kids. The rest of the time he lived in and for the party.

Day and night the Communists burrowed and bored. Wherever there was a suffering worker, there would be one saying: "It is because the means of production are owned by the capitalist class. We will seize them and run them by and for the workers, and then there will be plenty for everybody." Wherever there was a person who voiced a protest

and was beaten or jailed, the Communists would rush to his defence; and they would say: "You see, it is only the Reds who really care about the workers."

In all such labours they could count upon the full co-operation of the employing classes. Here in the midst of history's greatest depression, the masters clamoured for their full pound of flesh, and collected it. The New Deal had poured out billions of dollars, to enable them to make profits again; they made the profits, and put them in their pockets, without even a word of thanks, only abuse for their saviours. In the last couple of years the net profits of big corporations had doubled, and the prices of their stocks in Wall Street had tripled; the complement to that was the stretch-out and the speed-up, the screwing down of wages by one-third. The screwing up of production to its former peak was achieved with two-thirds the number of workers formerly required.

From such a sowing the Communists reaped the harvest. They would say: "You see how much the capitalists care for you! They are throwing millions of new people out of work. They don't even want to keep up the dole. They clamour for economy, the balancing of the budget—and what does that mean? It means more millions out of work, and more cutting down of relief! It means all these insults and humiliations you have to endure! Your EPIC Plan has been defeated by bribery and slander; they won't let you have any moderate remedy; they are determined to squeeze you down and starve you out!"

There would be leaflets pointing out all these facts, and ending up with a whole tier of slogans:

Unemployed, protest!
 Make your voices heard in Washington!
 Down with relief chiselling!
 Down with relief scabbing!
 Down with capitalist starvation!
 Demand union wages for relief workers!
 Demand recognition of unemployed unions!
 Oppose Fascism and capitalist war!

X

The cutting of wages and discharge of union workers brought its inevitable result in San Sebastian. The teamsters declared a strike, and in a few days the longshoremen followed, and there came a series of events familiar in American cities. For about a week the unions ran the town; they told the mayor what he could do; they told the employers what they could do. They issued a list of restaurants which were allowed to remain open; the hospitals and a few such institutions would be served; everything else was blockaded. The headquarters of the teamsters union became the centre of government for the city of San Sebastian.

The Self-Help Exchange was of course on the white list. There were numbers of unemployed teamsters and longshoremen who belonged to it, and all its trucks got permits and went freely through the picket lines. They were hauling food for the workers; and you may be sure their contact men were out picking up all the perishable stuff that was lying about. There came a carload of bananas to town; and bananas have to be watched and timed—on Monday they are ready for market, and on Wednesday they are rotten, and you have to pay somebody to take them out and dump them. Good old Bill Mase, who by this time knew everybody in the city, got a "tip" about those bananas, tied up the freight yards, and he found the owner and had an argument with him.

Businessmen are funny, the contact section had long ago learned; they like to bargain, and have to get something to salve their hurt feelings. This man couldn't let a carload of fruit go for nothing, not even to feed the unemployed. But after arguing back and forth for an hour, he was willing to take a credit of ten dollars with the co-op, to be paid for in labour on demand. The joke of it was, he never bothered to make the demand; but he felt that he had "sold" his bananas.

The trucks of the co-op came rolling, and the walls of the industrial centre were festooned with bunches of bananas; they would ripen and drop off on the heads of the ladies who were sewing shirts and pressing old pants. The teamsters and longshoremen got their share, of course—everybody connected with the strike had bananas for breakfast, lunch, and supper for several days. And just as they were beginning to tire of them, came sauerkraut, barrels and barrels of it; and then crates of

lettuce, and sacks of sprouting onions and potatoes—full of vitamins, so the medical section declared!

The employing classes of San Sebastian of course couldn't let such things continue. They made their plans in the seclusion of their offices, and the head of one of the big strike-breaking agencies came by airplane, and then came his carloads of plug-uglies, each with an automatic bulging on his hip. Presently the scab trucks began to move, and strike-breakers were loading the ships. And then of course there was rioting, the trucks were stoned, the cops came with their flying squadrons, and there was shooting, with several on both sides being carried to the hospital, and overtime work for Dr. Cass and others.

All of which, of course, was grist for the mill of Mrs. Jane Pitter, and her brother, Jake Burrige, and their newly appointed district organizer, Larry Peck. Larry was everywhere, making a dozen speeches a day; he lost his voice; he forgot how to sleep, almost how to eat. They opened a headquarters near the teamsters, they organized a committee for strike relief, and a soup kitchen where strikers were fed. They didn't do all this as Communist party members; they did it as friends of the workers, and they got all kinds of people to help them, clergymen, college professors, clubwomen who were made unhappy by a social conscience.

The union leaders feared and distrusted Communists, and never gave them any recognition. But what can you do when your families are starving and somebody comes to you with a pocketful of cash? What can hungry men do when they attend a meeting and a speaker tells them there is hot soup and bread and coffee for the asking at such and such an address around the corner? The men would take the money and eat the food, and say: "By God, them Reds ain't as bad as they're painted in the papers. The papers is saying it's a Communist strike anyhow, so what the hell difference does it make?"

There sprang up a terrific "Red scare" in San Sebastian. Various patriotic societies held meetings, and Mr. Len Saugus delivered an address at a luncheon of the Kiwanis Club, saying that he had been warning employers in this city for years, and now at last they saw he was right. The Chamber of Commerce issued a demand for action by the police, and next day one of the most notorious of the Red agitators was

arrested on a charge of "suspicion of criminal syndicalism." This was a man who went by the name of Larry Peck, but the papers reported that it was part of the Red camouflage, his real name was Boris Moskvich and he was reputed to be the financial agent of the Communist International on the Pacific coast.

A week later the strike was over, and the hungry workers went back to their jobs on the employers' terms. Three days after that Boris Moskvich, alias Larry Peck, was released, having had a much-needed rest and a chance to read a couple of the works of Lenin. He went back to his job of making Communist speeches every night, and organizing "innocents' clubs" all day; and whenever anybody wanted to "get his goat," all that person had to do was to call him Boris!

CHAPTER XIV

EDUCATION

I

PROFESSOR MICHAEL SPERRY, of the Department of Philosophy in Jefferson Junior College, had been summoned to the office of "prexy" two weeks in advance of the opening of school, and went in the frame of mind of a small boy who has been robbing the jam closet and expects to hear about it. In vain he told himself that he was a man of dignity and a scholar of repute, well on in his fifties; the fact remained that he was shaky in his knees. It was a serious matter for him, for the doctors had told him that he had a leaky heart valve, and no one needed to tell him that he had a wife, and two children old enough to work, but unable to find anything to do in the sixth year of the depression.

President Engstrom was the type of educator which was found necessary when education was promoted into the class of big business enterprises; that is to say, he was young, smooth-shaven, efficient, and limited. Just now he, too, was in a state of perturbation; but, like a competent executive, he did not permit it to show. "Sit down, Sperry," he said, and looked at his large, earnest-faced professor of philosophy, pale, studious, partly bald, and a trifle seedy in appearance.

"Doesn't keep himself up," thought prexy. "Brush the dandruff off his collar. Idealist. Making a fool of himself."

"Sperry," he began, "this is the very devil of a job I have to do, and I assure you I don't enjoy it. What put it into your head to get on to the platform with that Civil Liberties bunch?"

"So!" thought the professor. "I was right!" Aloud he said: "A sense of public duty. Certainly not any self-seeking."

"Don't you know that's a Communist outfit?"

"I know exactly the opposite. They are a group of public-spirited citizens, trying to preserve our fundamental liberties."

"They've managed to get everybody convinced that they're Reds."

"Well, in times like these, people are apt to believe what pleases them. It happens that the Civil Liberties Union has to defend many Communists, because they are the ones who are deprived of their constitutional rights."

"The rights which the Communists themselves repudiate! Guaranteed them under a Constitution which they are seeking to overthrow!"

"Quite true. But are we who believe in liberty going to prove the Communists right, by depriving them of liberty? I don't know any place in the Constitution which reserves its benefits to those who believe in it."

"The papers report you as criticizing severely the conduct of the police in the strike."

"I told what I myself had personally witnessed: perfectly wanton brutality, inflicted upon innocent bystanders—and very nearly upon myself. I don't think I look like a rioter or a menace to public order."

"You consider such investigations part of the duties of an educator?"

"I was not acting as an educator, but as an American citizen, with a sense of responsibility for my city and state."

"Every single account that has been published"—President Engstrom made a gesture towards a pile of clippings on his desk—"refers to the college, and to your position in it."

"That is something over which I have no control. I do not assent to the thesis that a college professor surrenders his rights as a citizen, nor yet his duties."

"It is not easy to draw the line in such a matter. I have

to deal with the practical problem. What you have done has brought attacks on the college; my mail is full of complaints about it. The people of this city don't want to send their children to be taught by what they call a 'Red' professor."

"Has it occurred to you how much of this may have been artificially stimulated by a little group of reactionaries?"

"It may be true, but they are powerful persons, and I have to consider the welfare of the institution. The service clubs have appointed a committee to investigate, and the first thing we know, it will be a committee of the state legislature. You know that we are dependent upon appropriations, and I am dependent upon the state board."

"Has anybody complained about me as a teacher?"

"I am sorry to say they have. They say that you discuss these same matters in class."

"Well, philosophy is a large subject, as you know. And when students ask me what liberty means, or what an ethical duty is, I have to tell them, or else say: 'I am not a free man and not a citizen, and I am forbidden to answer your questions.'"

"It isn't as if I hadn't warned you already, Sperry."

"I have no complaint on that score. I was warned, and I told you that my conscience would not permit me to pay heed to the warning."

They argued some more about it; until it occurred to the prexy that he was not acting in accord with his ideal of himself as a firm and efficient executive. He said, abruptly: "I am very sorry, Sperry, but you leave me no alternative. I have to tell you that your contract for this year will not be renewed."

There was a gone feeling inside the professor, and his voice was trembling as he finally said: "That's a pretty hard thing to tell a man this late in the year."

"It was not I who chose the time when you would appear on platforms with Communist agitators and their backers."

"I shall not be able to get another position this year, Engstrom. At my age it is pretty close to a death sentence you are passing."

"I have to choose between you and the institution we are supposed to serve. It would have been wiser if you had left these agitations to younger men."

"I would have been more than glad to do it, if I had seen

any signs of interest on the part of the younger men. But I see them cowed by the system, and occupied with trying to make their own careers."

There was a long pause. President Engstrom took that last remark as an insult, and a proof that he was dealing with a revolutionist. He would not waste any more time in argument.

"Your mind is made up on this?" asked Sperry, at last.

"I am sorry to have to tell you that it is."

"I can only say this one thing: I am not going to take it lying down. I shall have to make a public issue of it."

"That is your privilege—if you think it will help your career."

"I have already made it plain that that is not what I am thinking about. You have raised the issue of academic freedom, and I shall do what little I can to protect it, as I have to protect the constitutional rights of freedom of speech and assemblage, which the Chamber of Commerce and service clubs are seeking to reduce to a dead letter in San Sebastian."

"As you please," said the president, coldly. His anger was a comfort to him, because it justified him in the death sentence he had passed. The man would go out and "make a stink," and then everybody would hate him, and be glad to be rid of him.

II

Professor Michael Sperry gave a statement to the press, reciting how he had been deprived of his position after eleven years' service, because of his protest against violations of civil liberties during the recent strike. The papers published half a column of the story, and it made quite a sensation for one day. The concrete results were as follows: the Civil Liberties Union held a meeting of protest, and a couple of hundred persons came to listen to the professor explain his ideas of academic freedom and the duties of an educator as a citizen. Two club ladies called up and expressed their sympathies, and brought up the matter before their clubs, which voted down a resolution of protest. Half a dozen different "Red" organizations adopted resolutions, and invited the persecuted professor to speak at meetings on behalf of free speech. As many teachers' employment agencies assured the persecuted

professor that there was little chance of finding a vacancy this late in the year, but they would do their best.

That was all: except for a telephone call from a man who gave the name of Sigvald Soren, and said that he was connected with the Self-Help Exchange of San Sebastian.

"It seems to me I remember hearing you speak at an EPIC meeting," said Professor Sperry. "I voted your ticket, and I wish that you had won. I'll be very glad to talk with you."

So the persuasive Sig sat in the professor's book-lined study, and told him of a vision which now possessed the collective mind of the co-op: a college for the training of co-op workers. And here was a founder, president and professor all rolled into one!

As the contact co-ordinator pictured it, the country was drifting into bankruptcy and another collapse, and the only way out was through co-operation. But only a handful of people understood what the word meant, and the next crisis would find us without trained leadership. The co-ops were building themselves as little islands of defence against chaos; but the time was short, and they must extend their influence, and train men and women to understand not merely the theory of democratic industry, but its practice. Said Sig: "The men who are now guiding a few thousand workers will have to be guiding as many hundred thousand in a short time—perhaps by the end of this decade. They are mostly uneducated men, risen from the ranks. They need to know history, economics, politics, almost everything."

"Unfortunately, none of those are my departments," said Professor Sperry—"except possibly the everything!"

"What is needed is a trained mind, plus the qualities of courage and sympathy. The material is available, and it wouldn't take you many weeks to absorb it. I have written a pamphlet about co-operatives and how to organize them—you could get all that in an evening's reading. You doubtless know other educators in this town who would be sympathetic. There would be no lack of teachers—and surely no lack of students. Including the families of our members, we have contacts with several thousand people; and the number is growing all the time. Have you heard of Mr. Alding's plan?"

"Only vaguely."

"Well, he wishes to set up a chain of co-operatives all over

the state, to exchange products with one another. He feels quite sure that he will get Federal funds for this. There is a state project for four million and a half dollars—the state putting up three million and the Federal Relief authorities the rest. Those will be enormous developments—and who is going to manage them? Who is even thinking about it? ”

“Where do you expect to get the funds for your college? ”

“Co-operative enterprises have to be started without funds. There is a lot of talk about the WPA giving money for white-collar workers, and I should think a college of co-operation would come under this heading. Or we might get the backing of one of the big private foundations. The main thing is to start, and have something to show.”

“My own problem is embarrassing,” said the professor. “I am no longer a spring chicken, as you can see; and the depression has taken most of my savings.”

“It’s that way with all of us. But we find that we get along when we have to. It is my idea that the college would be a part of the co-op, and the teaching would be paid for in goods and services, and that would help. Also I think I can get a few donations. I myself go up into the mountains every November and December and cut Christmas trees; I earned a thousand dollars last year, and I’ve still got part of it, so I can give my services. The times are ripe for this idea, and we shall grow fast.”

“It would be your idea to have night classes? ”

“Both night and day. All kinds of people would take an interest—workers in the co-op, and their older children; teachers, social workers, clubwomen, even a few businessmen. It’s beginning to dawn on people’s minds that co-operation is the coming idea; they want to know what has been done in Denmark and Sweden and Great Britain, and what can be done here.”

“It’s certainly an interesting project,” said the professor. “I’m to have plenty of leisure, it appears, and I’ll be glad to look into it with you. What would you plan to call the institution? ”

“I’ve done some thinking about that,” said Sig. “I’ve learned that names make a lot of difference. I used to call myself a Socialist, but I found it was a bad word; it scared people. During the EPIC campaign we talked ‘production for use,’ but I fear they have put the curse on that too. I

have tried to think up a term that would describe our self-help co-operatives, and I am suggesting 'reciprocal economy.' How does that strike you?"

The professor smiled. "It certainly has a learned sound."

"I think," said Sig, "it don't do any harm to take people's fears and prejudices into account."

"No, I suppose not," said the professor, with melancholy in his voice. "It might have been the part of wisdom if I had done so."

III

There is a story of a young man who applied for a position as tutor, and when asked what he could teach, replied: "Anything, if you give me two weeks' start." This was something like the position of a professor who had written a book on the ancient Greek philosophies, and was now invited to organize and conduct a "College of Reciprocal Economy."

Michael Sperry had never thought of himself as the least bit of a radical, and was startled with the idea that he might become one. He was a man with an open mind; the old-fashioned belief that it was a scholar's duty to seek the truth, and tell it when he found it. He read Sig Soren's pamphlet that evening, and a vista of new ideas opened before his mind; here was a practical proposal, a whole set of new adjustments of means to an end.

As Maisie Trent had said, there were some persons who "got the dream" of the co-op; and Sperry was one of these. Going next morning to visit the various centres was like a trip into the future; he saw not merely dingy warehouses with scarred furniture and tattered wallpaper, and a musty smell of old clothes; he saw a new social form take shape; human beings working for mutual benefit, instead of a master for his own profit, and servants without interest in the enterprise which gave them their bread.

He inspected the bakery, the print-shop, the woodworking shop, and the sewing centre, where they now had a power machine, and were making shirts and other kinds of clothing. What he saw interested him so much that he brought his wife and son and daughter to the co-ordinating assembly; here was democracy really functioning in productive industry, a group of men and women who were leaders without being dictators,

and who met and solved a complex lot of problems with efficiency and speed. They had cast aside the formalities of parliamentary procedure; they had only three rules: "One thing at a time, talk to the point, be brief." They would settle a dozen problems in an hour's session; and when one of these competent-looking persons "took a commitment," you had a feeling that it was as good as done. The contact section also had three rules: "Vision it, go after it, don't come back without it."

If anybody had told this elderly professor of philosophy, and his wife, a college woman, and his much-educated young people, that they would put on their camping clothes and go out and squat in a field and pick tomatoes all day and enjoy it, they would have thought it at the least unlikely. But it was a way of meeting the co-oppers and getting to know them. When you did this, you made surprising acquaintances; for example, a former colleague of Sperry's, whom he had met on a steamer, and with whom he had inspected the ruins of the Parthenon. The man had dropped out of sight, and here he was in the tomato field, an "unemployable" according to the classification of the relief bureau.

Also an elderly physician and his wife, who had retired, come to California, and lost everything they owned in the world. The man who had charge of the picking in this particular group of vacant lots was the owner of the lots, a young architect who had given up the hope that anybody in California would ever again build a house. The section coordinator who had charge of the whole job was a former engineer who had designed and built elevators, and had given up hope that anybody would ever erect another office building in the United States. It was now his pride to direct the sorting and packing of several tons of tomatoes per day, for the transportation section to deliver on schedule time to the co-operative cannery which had got modern machinery from a grant under Herbert Alding's plan.

Professor Sperry found that there were many trained educators in the co-op, or in touch with it. There were numbers of young people who, like his own children, had been trained to become educators, but had a slim chance of ever getting a start. John Cass had been able to find doctors and dentists who, though they were kept fully busy, were willing to take time to help the co-operators; and in the same way

Sperry was able to find teachers who took fire at the idea of a "College of Reciprocal Economy."

When one taught an ordinary school or college, one had pupils who came because they were sent, and whose idea of education was a means of improving their social status and income. Those who came from a genuine love of knowledge were as rare as white blackbirds. But to a workers' college nobody came unless he or she wanted to learn. Workingmen came reverently, as to a shrine; they had looked upon knowledge as a privilege of the well-to-do, something to which their children might perhaps attain, but never themselves. Young people who had grown discouraged, confronting a world without jobs, took new hope at the vision of a way to make one's own job. All sorts of people came, with all sorts of motives; cranks and crackpots among them, but also the possibility of genius.

The Sperry family looked over the field, and went home and debated it for hours. It wasn't what the young people would have chosen, if they had had the whole world to choose from; but they had nothing else except idleness and despair. So the professor told Sig Soren that he was a convert, and that his family would sign up and do what they could.

IV

July, 1935, had come and gone, and Sig Soren and Maisie Trent were no longer the potential victims of a district attorney's malice, but the most respectable and law-abiding of married couples. The ceremony was performed by the Reverend Myers, of Grace Methodist Church, under whose sheltering wing the Self-Help Exchange had been born. The job was done on points—that is, Sig and Maisie used their credits to take out of the commissary a box of canned fruit and fresh vegetables for the parsonage.

They had a honeymoon. According to their promise, they paid a visit to Maisie's mother, to whom this served as the happy ending to a melodrama. Of course Sig Soren wasn't the sort of bridegroom that a bourgeois mother would have chosen; but he was so much better than her fears that she was content with the scenario writer's work. She had to admit that her son-in-law was good company, and she began right away giving Maisie advice about the tendency of his waistline

to expand, and the proper kind of diet to prevent this. Maisie said that if he went after Christmas trees at the end of the year, this matter would take care of itself.

But they weren't sure, because already Sig was all on fire with his idea of a college. He talked to everybody about it, even to his new mother-in-law, and she found this a dignified idea, and offered to continue the allowance of twenty-five dollars a month which she had been sending her daughter. When a couple of months later the plan actually got started, Mrs. Virginia Beverly Trent would remark complacently to her bourgeois friends: "My son-in-law is engaged in founding a college." When they asked what sort of college, she would say: "A College of Reciprocal Economy"; and they would nod their heads wisely.

Another person who was interested was Herbert Alding. He knew, as did few persons, how great was the need of training in both the theory and the practice of co-operation. Herbert had by now completed an elaborate plan for taking care of the unemployed, or, rather, enabling them to take care of themselves. But of course this plan would be so much waste paper, unless he could find competent and honest leaders to handle the funds and get people started at work. The young administrator was in distress of mind all the time over the problem, should he trust this one, and what about that one, and the stories which some other ones were bringing him. If he believed these stories and they were not true, he would be doing someone a grave injustice; on the other hand, if he refused to believe them, and they were true, he would be preparing scandals for his administration, and disgrace for his own name and his father's.

Prince Herbert himself was the product of a college, and he thought of that as the right and respectable way. When people had been through college, they were finished and certified, and had a diploma and a degree, which were matters of record and could be verified. Every school superintendent knew that if he hired a Ph.D., he had a standard product. What wouldn't Herbert give to be able to staff his department with a score or two of graduates of a College of Reciprocal Economy, and to put every co-op in the state of California under the supervision of a master, or doctor, or professor of Production for Use! He was so much drawn by this idea that out of his own funds he contributed two hundred dollars

towards the cost of paper and pencils and note-books and pamphlets for the new college to start on. With government funds he put some white-collar workers at research projects, to gather data and prepare study courses and bibliographies and whatnot.

Herbert Alding had come frequently to San Sebastian, and this new venture provided him with excuses for coming some more. Mabel Saugus was also interested in the college, and Herbert was interested in this exceptional young woman, who believed everything that he believed, and gave him wise advice about his difficulties. There were things that an administrator just couldn't confide to anyone in his own office; no, you couldn't have intimate friends in politics—and Herbert had learned, in the course of one year, that his work was politics, no matter how hard he tried to keep it something else. People betrayed confidences, they intrigued against you, and you had to learn to be reserved and aloof—your sword knowing no brother.

But Mabel Saugus was loyal, and really wise; gradually Herbert had come to depend upon her, and he told her so. One day he broke the reserve which he had kept in California, and pictured for her the strange, uncomfortable life of a rich man's son.

"My father," he explained, "is a very decided and aggressive man. It has never occurred to him that his way is not right. He has always had it, everywhere, in business and at home. He runs a big company, and he tells about a hundred and fifty thousand agents exactly what to do and say. He runs his home as if it were one more agency. I am the last of five sons, and all the others are exactly what my father wants them to be. They think just what he thinks, and they do what he tells them. I am the only one who has ever thought of being different."

"I can see that must have been hard for you, Herbert."

"You were brought up on a ranch, and you had animals to take care of, and things that had to be done. You cannot conceive the life of a boy in a home like mine. There were servants to do everything, and I never had to lift a finger. If I had tried to do anything I would have been in somebody's way. I look back on it now, and it seems to me that my only physical occupation in life had to do with little balls."

"Little balls?" said Mabel, puzzled.

"Balls of various kinds and sizes. I threw them around, or I batted them around, or I drove them across a field with a stick. It was and is the one respectable physical activity for everybody in my class. My brothers make it more complicated by getting on horses and then driving little balls around. One of them is very expert at getting into a swimming-pool and throwing a large ball around."

"It is very funny, Herbert. I never thought of it just that way."

"Now I am defying my father, and doing something that he thinks is terrible. I am lending my name, which is really his name, to this wicked New Deal. And of course I am always frightened about it, and afraid maybe I may do the wrong thing and disgrace myself, and worse yet, disgrace my father."

"I see exactly what you mean, Herbert," said Mabel. "I think you are right, and I think you are splendid."

"Do you really feel that way about me, Mabel? I cannot tell you how happy it makes me. I need to know that there is one person really supporting me. Perhaps you do not realize how much it has meant to me to come here and get your advice all through this trying year. It seems to me that you have the surest judgment of any person I have met."

"Well, that makes me happy, because the truth is, Herbert, I am just like you—always unsure of myself. I have had a trying experience too. I was just a plain ranch girl, and then all of a sudden I had a lot of money dumped in my lap. I don't know what to do with money. I am not used to moneyed people and their ways. I'm not sure that I ought to please them, or try to. Sometimes I do try, and fail, and then it's very humiliating."

"Oh, damn them!" exclaimed the man.

She smiled. "That's what I say now and then. But, you see, I am just as uncertain about my course as you are about yours."

"Mabel, look here!" he rushed on. "There is no use beating around the bush. If you can help me and I can help you, there's no reason we should not. What I came here for was to ask you if you would marry me. Then we won't either of us have to be afraid of anybody."

"Herbert! You take my breath away!"

"Why, dear?"

"Well, I thought you would be marrying such a different kind of girl. One that belonged in your set."

"Let me tell you something more. My father's hobby is orchids. He sends people to collect them from all over the world. Our house is full of orchids. Every piece of furniture has vases on it, and every vase has orchids in it. And the result is, I like daisies. It is the same thing about girls. All my life I have been surrounded by orchid girls. Every one has cost a fortune, and every one is marvellous, and every one has her whole being concentrated on her own marvellousness, and is looking for some man to consecrate his life to the task of saving her from boredom."

"They will think me a terrible person, Herbert."

"They will never have the chance to think anything about you, because, so far as I am concerned, you will never meet them. The only question is, if you think you can be happy with me."

Mabel put her hand in his. "I will tell you the truth, dear. I have been thinking for a long time that I could."

So there was another wedding for the co-oppers to get excited over. Mabel's older sister wanted to do the honours, and even Len Saugus was willing to forget his idea that all the New Deal administrators were secret agents of Moscow. It was impossible that anyone with a father so rich as Herbert Alding's could be really bad. But Mabel was not interested in making such use of her father-in-law's name. She would have liked to invite her friends of the co-op to the wedding, but there were too many of them, and she did not want to hurt anyone's feelings; so she and Herbert went to the Reverend Myers's study, with Jennie and Sig and Maisie as witnesses; and then they got into Herbert's car and disappeared, with no old shoes or showers of rice or tin-cans tied to the bumper.

V

The general assembly of the Self-Help Exchange spent an evening discussing the problem of education, and decided that this commodity was as important as bread or canned tomatoes or stove wood or shirts. Therefore the College of Reciprocal Economy was adopted as an integral part of the co-op. Sig Soren became the business manager, with the title of college co-ordinator, and Professor Michael Sperry was to be the

educational director; both to have seats at the round table. Members of the co-op were to get tuition on points, while outsiders were to pay a small fee. It was voted that, since those who taught in the institution would have to do a lot of homework and study, one hour's teaching would be assumed to represent two hours' work, and therefore be paid two hundred points.

Evening classes of the new institution were held in the rooms of a nearby public school, while the day classes and executive offices were in a vacant residence which was rented on points. The start was a good one, for more than seventy pupils enrolled during the first two weeks. They were people of all ages and walks of life, and they had only one thing in common, an eager curiosity. The professional teachers, Sperry and his colleagues, had never seen classes such as these, and the rumour of it spread in school circles, and superintendents and others in authority considered it a dangerous and unsettling influence. President Engstrom of Jefferson Junior College was reported to be taking the new enterprise as a personal affront, and this, needless to say, caused no grief in the Sperry family.

Sig Soren taught a class in the theory and practice of co-operation, and one on co-operation in Europe. Bill Mase lectured on the history of American community experiments; also on "Social Protest in American History," in the course of which he quoted words of Thomas Jefferson which would never be heard in Jefferson Junior College, and words of Sam Adams and James Madison which were not circulated by the Daughters of the American Revolution. A young teacher of biology set forth some views based on Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid as a Factor in Evolution*, a book which he had been forbidden to use in San Sebastian High. Professor Sperry lectured on "Social Classes in the Greek City-States," and Dr. John Cass on "The Development of Socialized Medicine in America." There was a young teacher who had been to Russia, and gave a course entitled "Education for Co-operation in the Soviet Union."

You couldn't have imagined how many interesting things there were to know about, or how many persons in the city of San Sebastian had acquired knowledge about them, and were willing to impart the same on points. For example, Philosophilus, the lover of the love of knowledge, welcomed

Professor Sperry as a colleague, and offered to give two courses, one on the casting of horoscopes, and the other on the history of astrology. There was Brother Lawrence, who loved the vegetables, and thought that an interesting course could be given on the origin and practice of humanitarianism in diet. A chiropractor proposed to teach his science, with demonstrations; also a new kind of healer who called himself a "cerebrospinal magnetologist."

This was California, and it had everything, new and old. There was a travelling numerologist who had measured the inner chambers of the pyramids, and demonstrated that their proportions concealed a prophecy of the New Deal and of the next World War. There was a Frenchman familiar with the arts of fencing masters of the *ancien régime*, and a lady who had studied Javanese dancing in Bali, and also the making of batik.

The educational director was quite overwhelmed, and feared he would give offence to all these would-be instructors. But most of them were amiable about it, and if they couldn't be teachers they were willing to be pupils. Thus Brother Lawrence enrolled himself for the course on Greek city-states: with his long hair and his white robe, he looked Biblical rather than classical, but he was deeply interested in the vegetarian habits of the Pythagorean communities. Philosophilus decorated several classrooms with his pirate's costume, and made inquiries about everything in the world from the history of printing to the chemistry of colloids.

The main thing, of course, was economics; the ability of America to produce comfort and plenty for all the people, and why this wasn't done under the present system, and how the people could get busy and do it for themselves. There were many who really did know these subjects, and they taught large classes, and the discussions were eager, so that many times they would forget to adjourn until the janitor of the school building turned out the lights. It was an odd fact that the janitor shared the resentment of the school authorities at this unorthodox development in education, and would never let them stay one minute after the legal hour of ten o'clock!

VI

The College of Reciprocal Economy educated its pupils quickly; and what was no less important, it educated the educators. Professor Michael Sperry was only one of many who had their outlook on life altered. Men and women would volunteer to teach some technical subject, such as bookkeeping or debating or mechanical drawing, and would find themselves in a new atmosphere, with a new code of manners and of ethics. They would become curious, and wish to know what it was all about; and before they realized it, they would become aware of a new world taking form, so much better than the old that they could with difficulty return to the old—even for promotion and honours and higher salaries which the old had at its disposal.

Teachers of economics had been taught the venerable theories of Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill—and without ever having heard that Mill had recanted and become a Socialist in his later years. They knew practically nothing about modern technology, which had put their ideas as much out of date as the architectural principles of ancient Babylon. They just didn't know that there was an economy of abundance, and that providing comfort and security for every person in America was no longer a problem of industry, but purely one of politics.

Teachers of politics didn't know why democracy had failed to work, and how it was being made to work in co-operative institutions—in the Scandinavian countries, in Britain, and even in California, right around the corner from their classrooms! Teachers of medicine didn't know why medical science hadn't worked, and how it was being made to work in the Soviet Union. Teachers of education didn't know why their feet were chained to the past, and experiments could not be tried. Teachers of journalism didn't know why their subject was poisoned with a gangrene. Teachers of religion didn't know why Christianity had failed, and how brotherhood was now being reduced to a science, and in process of being made automatic, on a mass-production basis.

All these different kinds of specialists came to the Self-Help Exchange, and if they had open minds, they were first surprised, and then fascinated, and then mentally remade. They

became converts to this new idea of applied brotherhood, and went out to tell the world about it—and found themselves becoming objects of distrust and fear on the part of those who had a vested interest in the old system. The pillars of churches, the superintendents of schools, the established medical authorities, the editors and publishers of capitalist newspapers—all these kinds of persons were banded together in defence of privilege, the strangle hold upon production. The menace to their empire had of late become so serious that they were uniting in recognition of the need of suppressing every new idea in every field of human endeavour. The Nazis had supplied the technique, with their “*Gleichschaltung*” and their “totalitarian state,” in which the utterance of any new thought was punished, first, with the crushing of the testicles, and if that was not enough, the severing of the head in a public ceremony by an executioner in a swallowtail coat.

VII

Mabel's idea of a honeymoon was to travel over the state of California with her husband, and sit in at long conferences with the co-op leaders, and inspect their industrial centres and read their reports. While they were motoring to the next town, they would discuss the various personalities and projects; and this was a great comfort to Herbert, who suffered from self-distrust, but had been forced to keep the secret locked in his bosom.

There was a feud on between Herbert and Angus McTeagle. The young administrator had not been able to see his way to letting government funds be used to build up Mac's organization; wherefore the old man insisted that the funds were being used to undermine his organization. Other co-ops got the grants, and he was busy calling meetings of protest against the officials—“McTickling them,” as it was called, sending deputations to Washington to make charges against the California administration. Prince Herbert had to listen to long arguments and scoldings, and answer charges made by men who might or might not know them to be false.

Herbert found it hard to be sure, and came more and more to rely on his wife's judgment. He had thought he would help his position with the co-operators by his marriage to a

Californian; but alas, they didn't think of Mabel as a ranch woman, they thought of her as a rich woman; and if ever Herbert said anything in favour of the round table as a feature of democratic administration, the McTeagle crowd would grumble: "Oh, yes, his wife is from San Sebastian! That's where he got that!"

Herbert had assumed a grave responsibility in the sponsorship of his elaborate plan. If you had one institution with a score of small industries, as at San Sebastian, it might never achieve mass production, but at least it could keep going; it would afford a basis of security and self-support on a humble scale. But if you plumped for specialization, as Herbert had done, and the interdependence of a large number of co-ops, then you were under the necessity of getting them all going, otherwise you would have your units piling up a lot of goods for which there were no consumers. It had to be everything or nothing; either you had all kinds of production, and kept the goods circulating—or else you had a lack of some things, and a surplus of others, and no way to get rid of the surplus without invading the business market.

That had been the rock on which the so-called "Ohio Plan" had broken. The government had subsidized a group of co-operatives, one to make mattresses, another bedsteads, and so on. Presently, there had been a great quantity of mattresses, and no one in the co-ops able to buy them, and the private mattress manufacturers protesting at the impending ruin of their business; the same for the furniture, the canned goods, the shirts and clothing. Despite the fact that this system had proved its ability to save eighty-five per cent of Ohio's relief costs, the authorities in Washington had lost their nerve and shut the thing down; so there was Uncle Sam with fourteen hundred bedsteads on his hands, an undignified position for the richest old gentleman in the world. Of course the capitalist press made the most of this opportunity, pointing out the collapse of one more of these New Deal absurdities. The government couldn't run business, and the workers couldn't run business; there was no way but the sound, established American way of letting the businessmen run business.

Now here was Herbert getting himself into the same jam. He had set one co-op at doing all the canning; he had promised that other co-ops would bring them materials, and others would take their products in exchange for bread and butter and beans

and boots and bedsteads. So they had stacked up the cases of canned peaches and pears and plums and tomatoes; they had shipped them to all the co-ops which had anything to swap; they had supplied the transient relief camps, and the CCC camps, and all the other Federal and state agencies. Now they confronted this situation: the transient relief camps had gone out of business—a new change of policy; the CCC boys had all they could eat for a whole season; the co-ops had all they could pay for; while the canning co-op had no more funds to buy materials. So they were shut down, and the whole outfit was clamouring at the administrator's door.

VIII

Herbert Alding had been assured in Washington that it was the definite policy to build up co-operatives, as a means of making the unemployed self-supporting and taking them off the backs of the taxpayers. He had gone to work in good faith, and now for more than a year had been giving all his time and energies to setting up an office staff and making wise allotments of funds. He had been making promises and commitments, awakening hopes—and now, for some reason, his recommendations for grants were not being honoured. The lady-bureaucrat who had sent him to this job was not answering his letters as frankly as she had formerly done, and sometimes when he tried to get her on the phone she was too busy to talk to him.

The Self-Help Exchange of San Sebastian had been led by the administrator's promises to work out an elaborate programme for the extension of their work, to enable their twelve hundred members to live entirely out of the commissary. They were asking for a total of a hundred and eighty-two thousand dollars. Nearly half of this was for purchase of equipment: a full line of tools for the garage section, an outfit for a battery shop, and for welding, and the retreading of tyres; several new trucks; a 40-foot boat, with dories, camp equipment and fishing gear; two more power sewing machines for the clothing section; a real canning outfit; more axes and saws for the wood section; ladders, paintbrushes and tools of various sorts for the maintenance section; more equipment, seed, and fertilizer for the gardening section; a furniture plant for the toy section; new typewriters and adding machines for the headquarters; equip-

ment for a poultry ranch, with runs for five thousand chickens and two hundred doe rabbits. All these industries they now had in operation on a small scale, and in all of them they had proved their competence. They were persisting in asking for a loan, not a gift, and offered to pay for this equipment over a period of twenty years.

The rest of the money was to enable them to pay wages in part cash, so that their members might be able to stay with the co-op, instead of being drawn off to relief jobs. Since admittedly the WPA was an emergency measure, why not just as well let the people on relief get their money through a co-op? For this privilege they would gladly pay, as soon as they got their new equipment into action; they would can food and make clothing and furniture for other relief workers and for the CCC camps, and thus repay the money over a period of ten years. They had a solid achievement to back up such promises; their books showed that every dollar which had been given to them had been turned into six dollars' worth of relief.

Because of his wife's interest in the Self-Help Exchange, this application weighed heavily upon Herbert Alding's mind. Mabel changed it from so many typewritten pages, a list of various machines and supplies, into a small army of human beings; and not merely names, but faces, and stories, and cries of suffering and protest. Scotty Adams, the carpenter, who had refused obstinately to go on relief, but stuck by the co-op, and had grown so thin that he staggered. Old Jerry Mason, head of the gardening section, who was ill, but so loved his fields of peas and beans and lettuce that he had himself driven out every day to watch them and give orders to his crew. The Jett family, whose youngest infant had been born almost literally in Mabel's arms. That had been nearly three years ago, and the generous-hearted public had long since forgotten the Jetts and their story. Now they were on relief, a starvation dole for seven persons, and Cristy had to earn it with a pick and shovel—the singing of folk songs, it appeared, was not recognized as a "white-collar" project.

There was a terrible story going the rounds about the Jetts. Food had become so scarce with them that they could no longer afford to keep Dink, the dog they had brought with them from the Red River country; he was getting old anyhow, and so one night Cristy had killed him, and they had made him into a stew, and the children had been told that he was a big jack-

rabbit. But Cristy himself could not eat any of this stew, and had had to go behind the house to hide his weeping. When Mabel told that story, Herbert said he would try the long-distance telephone again; and when it did not work, he said they would extend their honeymoon, and go to Washington and make a fight.

IX

In the hinterlands of America there survived, far underground, remnants of a twice-powerful organization, the Ku-Klux Klan, and under provocation it would flare into sudden life. Let a group of college students attempt to hold a peace meeting, or let a wandering agitator attempt to organize some cotton pickers, or let a college instructor be so indiscreet as to live in the same house with his secretary—and straightway the fiery cross would be lighted on the hills, and the white-robed figures would meet in a lonely glen, and a sign would be nailed on the victim's door: "Beware! The Klan rides again!"

This was the klan of the poor. When one travelled to the East, towards the end of this year 1935, one found that there was another klan forming, that of the rich. They, too, were holding meetings, not by the countryside, but in the padded leather armchairs of the big city clubs; they burned their crosses of gold, and danced their war dances, and muttered their spells, and laid plans for the tarring and feathering of the New Deal and all its partisans. There was no longer conversation at dinner-tables and in country clubs, there was only denunciation of Roosevelt and all his works. Investors in an automobile concern which had made \$135,000 profit in the year 1932, and was in process of making \$135,000,000 in the year 1935, could think of not one single good thing to say about the administration which had increased their dividends one thousand per cent.

The rich made the same mistake that the poor were making—they judged the President by his speeches instead of by his measures. They hated and feared him, and set up a propaganda machine to ridicule and denounce him—calling this organization, with no thought of irony, the American Liberty League. They set out to prove the Marxian thesis of the class

struggle, even in the land where there were no classes; and they made it hard for people like Herbert Alding and his wife, who still believed there might be orderly progress towards a co-operative society.

It was Mabel's first trip to the East, and she found it a strange experience. It was no news to the sister of Len Saugus that the New Dealers were agents of Moscow; but she had thought of Len as a pathological case, and now she found herself in a pathological world. She listened to conversation in the smoking-cars—open now to the ladies as well as to the men; she listened in hotel lobbies and restaurants—and then in the home of J. Seymour Alding, president of the International Insurance Company.

It was an ordeal that had to be faced; for not to have called on Herbert's father would have been an affront. They sent a telegram, and were met at the station, and driven to the mansion on the Hudson, and Mabel really marvelled at the orchids and the hot-houses in which they were grown—she hadn't been brought up on them, like Herbert. She did everything possible to be a polite and agreeable daughter-in-law, and not to say one word of opposition or argument. But the old gentleman just couldn't keep himself in. He had heard the President talking over the radio the previous evening, and he was in the position of a boiler as the safety valve begins to lift. He would storm and fume; and Mabel, the wretched hypocrite, would say: "Yes, Mr. Alding; my brother would agree with you about that!"

He would check himself, and force himself to talk about California, and the climate, and the honeymoon journey. They were going to Washington? Yes, everybody was going to Washington these days; the headquarters of American business had been moved, and men who had spent their lives learning to administer practical affairs now went and cooled their heels on the doorsteps of insolent young bureaucrats, understrappers who had learned a lot of fancy phrases and formulas, and were now turned loose to play with the billions of wealth which the American people had accumulated by a century of hard toil and thrift——

The old gentleman would check himself again. He observed this new daughter-in-law; a crude country woman, obviously, and not the wife Herbie's parents would have chosen. But parents weren't consulted these days. Parents were supposed

to stay at home, and let the young people take the world and run it to hell in a hurry——

The crude country woman was asking questions about his orchids; trying to please him, of course, pretending to want to know. Or perhaps she really was interested; after all, it was the greatest collection of orchids in the world, and the fortune that was in those greenhouses was greater than the one in the vaults downtown—and just as safe too, because thieves wouldn't steal rare orchids, they were too easy to keep track of—like the Lindbergh ransom money.

She was a decent enough girl, and probably the best they could have hoped for from a freak like Herbert. She wouldn't spend his money on ermines, and she wouldn't drag him into the divorce courts, or get in jail—or would she? J. Seymour had heard that it was a favourite stunt of those Reds to get arrested, in order to attract attention to themselves. But probably they didn't do that any more, since they had got possession of the government, and could sit in swivel chairs and give orders to those who had established the security and wealth of the country—breaking down everything that older and wiser men had built up——

It was a great relief to Mabel to go upstairs and see dear Mrs. Alding, who had a weak heart, and knew nothing about politics, except that it was a horrid subject which caused people to quarrel at dinner parties. Herbie's mother saw that her darling had married a good, kind girl, who would understand him and take care of him as his mother had used to do. She was sweet and gentle, and didn't urge them to wait and meet all her other children—because they all had in-laws, and these in-laws, while all right in their own way, were rather hard on persons who had had the misfortune not to be born in their own social circles.

X

Herbert and Mabel came back a few days before the Christmas celebrations at the co-op. "Grand doings!" Maisie had written. "Don't miss them!" She and Sig and Charlie Day went down to the train to meet their friends, and Jennie Gideon had dinner ready for them all at Mabel's house.

It was rather a melancholy home-coming; for the couple

were depressed by what they had found in Washington. Yet their lips were sealed. Herbert had been behind the scenes, he had met the persons who determined policies, and he could not honourably reveal what they had confided to him. Their friends would have to read between the lines, so to speak; and having read, they must not pass it on.

"Then we won't get the loan?" asked Sig in misery.

"Herbert has a sort of half promise," replied Mabel. "But the way things stand in Washington now you can't believe any promises. As one man said, they're good for twenty-four hours."

The couple went on to talk about what they had seen and heard and felt; the "heat" which was being turned on the administration by the Ku-Klux of the rich. So little by little the things which Herbert and Mabel couldn't say were said indirectly. The substance of it was that they were within less than a year of election day; and what was the use of any plan or project if you had only a year to go with it? What would be deadier than a New Deal that was swept into the discard? The date of November 3, 1936, stood in everybody's thoughts like a stone wall blocking the highway. Until you got by that, everything was uncertainty.

There appeared just now to be a sharp reaction throughout the country. The enemy was attacking all along the line, and the President and his supporters were on the defensive. Economy and fear of inflation were the watchwords; the budget was going to be balanced—or at least it was going to look as if it were balanced. Criticisms of the "nine old men" were to be hushed, and no new policies were to be announced. The President had declared that "this business of relief" was coming to an end; which meant that half the poor had been arbitrarily called "unemployable" and thrown back on to the near-bankrupt counties and states. That was why the transient camps had been dropped, and the miserable vagrants were wintering in Hoovervilles and holes in the hill-sides.

It was a sad story, and the hearts of Maisie and Sig and Charlie sank as they listened. Mabel described scenes in the fashionable hotel where they had stopped; ladies and gentlemen, chatting over their afternoon tea, lifting the Sèvres cups to their lips with jewelled fingers having tinted nails, sentencing a million people to death with a witticism about political

strategy. Herbert had flown into a rage—the first time his wife had ever seen him lose his self-control. “Do you know that back in San Sebastian people on relief are cooking and eating dogs?” How truly shocking!

Herbert's superiors had been considerate of one who was young and unusually idealistic. They had pointed out how they were all in the same boat; they must hang together, or the Liberty League would hang them separately. Herbert's projects—yes, he had made promises, and so had they, but what could they do, when orders came from above? Orders right from the top, so it was said. They would let Herbert have some money, a little at a time, but not enough to be conspicuous, no big plans, no announcements to frighten the chambers of commerce. Everything came back to Washington now; committees of the unemployed, committees of mayors of bankrupt cities, lobbyists from business groups which wanted it both ways, economy with the right hand and doles with the left, subsidies to business on Mondays and budget balancing on Wednesdays—so said one of the embittered officials. Herbert must be a good sport, stand his share of the “gaff,” and not make trouble for those who would gladly help him if it were allowed.

XI

Christmastime was here, and you must wrap up your troubles in your old kit-bag, and smile, smile, smile. Sig Soren had been up into the high Sierras and cut a Christmas tree—he was an authority on Christmas trees, having cut fifty thousand of them. But this year he had cut only one—he had given up his Christmas tree contract in order to start the college.

His one tree was the finest ever seen in San Sebastian, and several rich persons had offered to buy it; the round table had voted that they would be glad to sell it—after Christmas! Meantime, they set it up in the new centre, where they had the restaurant in front, and then the kitchen, and a huge warehouse at the back. The last wouldn't be very warm—but then, people could keep their coats on, and praise the California climate.

Such a list of kids they had coming to the party! A mother

would come with a baby tucked under the left arm, while she registered it with the right. The toy section worked for weeks getting presents ready, but they just couldn't get enough. Then at the last moment came salvation—not galloping on horseback, as in the old melodramas, but rolling in a limousine.

A great day in the life of the Self-Help Exchange; the first visit from Mrs. Patricia Fleming. You would have had to live in San Sebastian to understand just what that meant. For nearly three years Old Thee had been helping the co-op now and then, and coming to sit on a log and watch the boys work; but the great Mrs. Pat had never once crossed their threshold. It was a principle with her that everything her husband liked was vulgar and common; Mrs. Pat had her own charities, old and long-established, conducted by managers who took her orders, and were not tainted with subversive notions about equality and independence. But she had heard so much about the new institution that now at last her curiosity prevailed; first she sent them a huge bundle of old clothes and a lot of other useful things, and then she came in person, saying it had occurred to her that they might need help with their Christmas preparations.

And did they need help! They were wrapping all their packages in pieces of comic sections of the Sunday papers—and what kind of way was that to wrap Christmas gifts? "Tell my chauffeur to come in," commanded Mrs. Pat; and then: "James, I want you to go downtown right away and get me enough silver paper and red ribbons for—how many children have you? Seven hundred—good gracious, how many children you do have! Seven hundred packages, James."

James drove off, and came back with half a stationery store. Meantime his mistress had made the discovery that they didn't have enough presents, and not good enough ones; so this time she went herself, and brought back a limousineful. By then she had got so interested that she sat down with the other women, that great lady of society, and spent the rest of the day helping to wrap and tie packages for the too-numerous children of the poor.

Sig Soren was Santa Claus. He had said he wouldn't do anything so silly, but Maisie had said he would, and she had put it in the *Pointer*. They had borrowed a suit from the Salva-

tion Army, and what fun they had dressing him up in the kitchen. The presents were tied in three huge sacks—"copra bags," Cristy Jett called them, a name the others had never heard and which they thought was funny. You can believe that it took a real load to stagger that co-operative Santa Claus; he got them to the tree—and how the seven hundred kids did cheer and shout and clap! That wonderful tree shone like something supernatural, and under it was a little bag of candy for each and every kid.

Also there was a dance for the old folks; those "square dances" that they knew and loved. There were coffee and doughnuts—with raisins in the doughnuts, extra for Christmas. There was a regular vaudeville show, with music and dancing, and jokes about everybody and everything in the co-op. Outsiders wouldn't have made much of it, but the members whooped and "stomped."

The climax of the evening was an extra number; Cristy Jett disappeared for a time, and came back announcing that he had composed a Christmas ballett for the co-op. They cheered him, and put him in a chair on the platform; he stroked his banjo a few times, and then sang that slow and mournful tune which had paid for his dinner at the ranch house on the highway coming up the Rio Grande Valley, just before you get into El Paso. This time it was not a lover dead in the war, but a personal story of Christmas in the Self-Help Exchange of San Sebastian!

Oh, out of the Red River country

I journeyed far away,
For to breathe the air
Of that land so fair,
Called Californy-ay!

Oh, once in a stable manger
A babe was born in the hay,
And the wise men came
To worship his name
In Bethlehem far away.

And once in a personnel office
A babe on the floor did lay;
The ambulance came,
Not askin' his name,
In Californy-ay!

And so the co-op we diskivered
And learned the better way;
We chop the wood
For brotherhood
In Californy-ay!

Oh, people learn that lesson
And seek the better way;
The masters no more
Shall bleed the pore
In Californy-ay!

BOOK V: 1936

CHAPTER XV

THE TOWER OF REFUGE

I

BODKIN was sorting the eggs. That was one of his important duties, many times stressed and carefully watched. The largest eggs were for the master and family, the smallest for the servants, and the medium size were taken by the grocer in trade. The ones for the family were dated with a little rubber stamp provided for that purpose; and always the two which Mr. Snell had for his breakfast were ceremoniously presented to him before they were opened; he would examine the dates, in purple ink, and make sure they were of the previous day. Those which were turned over to the grocer were, of course, not dated; if the grocer's customers got their eggs somewhat less than fresh, that would prove to Mr. Snell the advantages of possessing a country estate.

Peter Parley Snell was the master's name, and he was the creator and sole proprietor of Parley's Pellets. If you live anywhere within the sound of a radio in the United States, you know the Parley Pellet Period, in which the world's most celebrated comedians disport themselves, and when they finish, the jazz orchestra strikes up, and a voice like that of Jehovah speaking from the burning bush tells you what Parley's Pellets will do for your liver and your kidneys and your nerves; ending always with the Pellet Song:

Parley's Pellets take it through,
Parley's Pellets make you new.

This provider of entertainment and health for the American people lived on a royal estate high above the city of San Sebastian; two hills and a valley between, and a wide-sweeping view; a real gentleman's place, and a real achievement for

one who had begun life selling patent medicines at one dollar per bottle at county fairs. This was America, which the Germans used to call the land of unlimited possibilities; anything could happen, and it did, including the transformation of Mr. Snell, who had once worn a curly black moustache and pomaded his hair, and now was rotund and urbane, and never committed social errors—because, when in doubt, he asked Bodkin.

Bodkin was a settled man of middle age, and when strangers were present he was as solemn as a judge, the perfect model of a butler in the English tradition. But when he was alone with his master he permitted his sense of humour to show, and he would argue with Mr. Snell, even over such subjects as politics. Peter Parley hadn't been sure if he ought to permit such liberties, but Bodkin had assured him that Lord Relstuck had always discussed politics with him, and often taken his advice. (The name has been thus spelled in order to spare the reader an embarrassment; the correct way to spell it is of course Ravelstoke, but the British nobility do not pronounce their names as they spell them.)

Henry Bodkin's story was as peculiar as that of his master, and one more proof that anything can happen in America. He had been born on a farm in Missouri, and drafted into the war. Slightly wounded in battle, he had carried off the field a British officer wounded near to death. Of course the officer could do no less than offer to be of help to the man after the war; and so it had come about that Bodkin had been taken into the household of Ravelstoke (Relstuck) Manor, and taught the ritual of the perfect servant. When the spirit of adventure moved him to return to his own country, he felt certain that a letter from his lordship would assure him a position anywhere; and it did.

It enabled him to tyrannize over the family of Peter Parley Snell. The lady of this household had begun life as a circus rider, and she still had a longing for cloth of silver dresses and leopardskin coats, and it was one of Bodkin's duties to tone her down. "My lady," he would say, mildly, "do you really think that a green hat and a purple dress accord with your special style of beauty?" And what could a circus queen answer? Lady Ravelstoke (Relstuck) had always been glad to have Bodkin's advice about her costumes. And as for questions of how to entertain guests, of course Weenie

Snell had books of etiquette, but it was hard for her to concentrate on a book. As the public left its health to Parley's Pellets, so Weenie left her household to Bodkin.

II

They were having a dinner party at "Highcrest"; one of those state ceremonies which were performed as correctly as high mass in a Catholic church. The cut glass sparkled, the silver shone, the flowers were profuse and harmonious, the candles numerous and tall and virginal; the menu was exactly right, just enough and not too much, the wines well chosen and appropriate to each course; the glasses each of the proper size and shape, the various implements laid in correct order. Two footmen wore splendid and yet dignified livery, and Bodkin himself looked like a diplomat at Geneva. He moved here and there as silently as if he were a teleplasm, and his orders to the men were given by the slightest motions of the fingers or nods of the head. If now and then he personally assisted, it was in honorific ways, the finishing touches.

It was really a diplomatic dinner; important matters to be settled and discussed, so Bodkin had been informed. Eight gentlemen, and two ladies—who ranked as gentlemen, since they were active in affairs. Bodkin was not supposed to have ears, except if one of the guests should murmur a request; Bodkin was supposed to be an impersonal presence, a part of the machinery created by modern technology for the preparing of food and placing it in front of those persons who belong within the enchanted circle.

But Bodkin was an American farm boy with a sense of humour and an interest in what was going on in the world; Bodkin made note that one of the guests was Robert P. Stone, district attorney of San Sebastian county, and that another was Mr. Len Saugus, honorary president of the San Sebastian branch of the Better America Federation, and that another was Mrs. Gwennie Wattles, president of the Wednesday Morning Club, whose anti-Red speeches were often quoted in the newspapers. Another was Mr. Allingham, president of the local Chamber of Commerce, and another the millionaire publisher of the *Morning Enterprise*. Yes, there were big doings to-night; and Bodkin, even while watching for the moment to

serve the entrée and the one to pour the sauterne, still had plenty of time to note the conversation.

"The point is," Mr. Snell was insisting, "we can't understand the use of having a law on the statute books if it is not going to be enforced."

"Theoretically," said Mr. Stone, "it ought not to happen. But as a matter of fact there are thousands of such laws."

"But surely," put in Mrs. Wattles, "there is no law more important than the one against criminal syndicalism; none more urgently needed."

It was evident that these ladies and gentlemen had invited the district attorney with the intention of "turning the heat on him." He explained patiently that it was a practical question; there was no use trying to enforce a law when you found you couldn't get convictions. The sentiment of juries—

"But how can anyone know the sentiment of juries, Mr. Stone?" put in Mr. Saugus. "No one has attempted to enforce this law in ten years."

"You ladies and gentlemen are the taxpayers," argued the official, "and it is your money I am trying to save. These trials drag out for many weeks. There are fanatical believers in what they call free speech who come to the aid of the defendants—"

"They ought to be in jail too!" said Mr. Snell.

"If you can show me a way to put them in, I'll be quite willing. But I have not been able to find it. The general result of these so-called political prosecutions is to make martyrs of the defendants and advertise their cause."

"Every criminal thinks he is a martyr, Mr. Stone." This from Mrs. Wattles, who had read a book about them.

"I know, Mrs. Wattles; but each criminal is generally alone in his opinion, while the Reds are solidly united for what they call their cause."

"Then we have to sit supine while this war on society is planned?" demanded Mr. Saugus.

"I am putting the practical difficulties before you. It costs a great deal to get the evidence in such cases—"

"But it won't cost anything in this case, Mr. Stone. Our society has collected a mass of evidence."

"What we find is that people bring us what they believe to be evidence, but when we study it we find it won't stand up in court."

"We have a dozen witnesses who will testify that this man who calls himself Larry Peck—I am told that his real name is Boris Moskvich, and that he comes direct from Stalin——"

"Can you prove that, Mr. Saugus?"

"No, I don't say I can prove that. But the witnesses will testify that he has been going up and down this city advising the unemployed to sell their lives dearly to the police."

"Now then, Mr. Saugus," said the district attorney, "imagine that you are the witness, and that the attorney for the defence is cross-examining you. Did the defendant say that he wished to overthrow the government?"

"Not in those words, perhaps. But the plain implication——"

"Ah, but implications are a matter of your interpretation, as against the defendant's. He will swear that what he meant is that the Reds are to defend themselves against wanton and illegal attacks by the police."

"But that is nonsense, Mr. Stone!" broke in Mrs. Wattles. "The police are there to enforce the law."

"The Reds say they are there to deprive the Reds of their right to freedom of speech and assemblage at the behest of the capitalist class. That is a regular formula they have; their attitude is always defensive—they are resisting the violence of the masters."

"Surely they can't maintain that about this fellow, Joe Timmick, Mr. Stone." This from the host of the evening. "They tell me he has led attacks on the police."

"Joe Timmick is another case. I know him well, I have prosecuted him twice and sent him to jail. Joe is an old I.W.W. What he does is to tell the strikers' women to get bricks and throw them at the police. He leads the fight, and it is easy to convict him for rioting or resisting arrest."

"But he gets only six months for that."

"He got a year last time."

"He's out again now, I am told," said Mr. Saugus; "living in one of those tin shacks down by the tracks, and helping to organize unemployed demonstrations."

"It is hard to see how we can keep the unemployed from demonstrating, Mr. Saugus. If we jail one leader a dozen others start up. We've tried the experiment with Joe Timmick, and when he was in jail he ran a Red demonstration there."

They argued back and forth. They got so excited that Mrs. Wattles didn't even touch her fat and brown little squab, and Mr. Saugus got only two bites of his, a chunk of each breast. It takes some concentration to eat a squab, and these were home-grown and hand-fed, and Bodkin's feelings were hurt. When he served the coffee—in tall thin glasses, Russian style—they had turned enough "heat" on Bob Stone so that he agreed he would not permit the agitation among the agricultural workers this season, and that if it started, he would get after Larry Peck and the other Communist party leaders, and make one more attempt to get convictions under the California criminal syndicalism act.

Bodkin didn't hear the rest of the discussion, because it was moved into the drawing-room. When he came in with the brandy decanter and the tray of tiny glasses, they had got on to the subject of the shocking conditions as to sexual morality prevailing in the White House. The stories were such that Mr. Allingham, who had just come back from Washington, had to apologize to the ladies before he repeated what he had learned. The president of the Chamber of Commerce did not mention, and possibly did not know, that the same kind of stories had been whispered over the country about every family which had occupied the White House since it had been completed and moved into in the year 1799.

III

"Bodkin, that was a very good dinner we had last night, and everything went off well." Mr. Peter Parley Snell believed in praising the servants when they earned it.

"Thank you, sir," said Bodkin. This while he was presenting the toast and coffee, and the two largest eggs, each stamped with yesterday's date in purple ink. He added: "Our first strawberries looked so delicious that I thought I might tempt you with a few."

Mr. Snell looked at the red and luscious objects in the little glass dish, and yielded weakly. "All right, Bodkin, but don't do it again. I have to watch my waistline, and I have to have your help."

"Very good, sir." Bodkin smiled, having heard the same order several times before, and knowing that he was supposed to disobey it.

When the morning mail came, he put it on a silver tray and took it out to his master, who was reading the paper on the loggia. The sunshine was bright, and the January air warm enough for roses. The master had on his dark glasses—"Old eyes getting weak, Bodkin!" He looked over his letters, and then told Bodkin to put out the table tennis, and to ask his daughter to come and play with him. Bodkin did this.

The young lady delayed, and meantime the master stood looking at the view, and the butler looked at it also, and it was not presumptuous of him to see the same view and think the same thoughts about it. This was one of the occasions when Lord Ravelstoke (Relstuck) would have chatted with him; so Bodkin remarked: "The tower is going to be quite an ornament to the landscape, sir."

"Yes, isn't it!" exclaimed the master. He was very proud of his tower, his own idea.

It stood on a rounded hill on the other side of the little valley: three stories high, built of solid concrete, so that it was fireproof, with steel reinforcing, so that it was earthquake proof. Its foundation was a large chamber of heavily reinforced concrete, and before the tower was built, an artesian well had been drilled, so that the water supply could never be cut off. In short, that basement was a bombproof shelter, and when it was completed, it was going to have an electric light plant with a gas engine, and to be stocked with about a ton of every variety of canned foods. Inside the tower proper was a spiral stairway, and at each level was a comfortable-sized room, with no windows, but slits so built that rifle or machine-gun fire could be turned in any direction. There were going to be two machine-guns at each level, and a rack full of rifles; also there would be folding beds and chairs and a fully equipped kitchenette—everything for the comfort of a family and its garrison. On top there would be a revolving searchlight.

"You know, sir," said Bodkin, "a field gun could destroy that tower in three or four shots, after it had got the range."

Mr. Peter Parley Snell looked at his butler sharply. "What do you know about such matters, Bodkin?"

"You forget, sir, that I was through the war."

"Oh, yes, I did forget."

"I was in the artillery, sir, and I served a field gun, and destroyed many kinds of towers."

"Too bad you didn't remind me, Bodkin, and give me the benefit of your experience."

If there was any touch of sarcasm in this, the butler pretended not to notice. "I could have helped you to avoid several errors, sir."

"What, for example?"

"The French pill boxes are all very low, and have rounded domes, and most of the rooms are underground, sir."

"Well, the fact of the matter is, Bodkin, I am not expecting the enemy to have artillery. I am thinking about mobs from the city. I expect the army will come to our defence sooner or later."

"Quite so, sir. But since you are putting in a water supply, I thought you expected to hold out against a siege."

"The well does no harm, and the water can be used for irrigation."

"You can't have anything growing on the slopes of that hill, sir, if you wish to keep your visibility."

"I understand that. The hill will be cleared entirely, and its slopes will be graded so that there are no places for hiding."

"You have thought about planes, sir?"

"There is to be a landing field on that level place this side of the tower."

"I mean planes attacking you, sir."

"I don't think it likely the Reds will have planes—do you, Bodkin?" Mr. Snell wanted to be haughty and aloof at all times, but his worries got the better of him.

"You can't be sure, sir. Have you thought how many technical men of all sorts there are among the unemployed? It looks as if there might be more chance of a revolution being led by them than by the ignorant rabble."

"Look here, Bodkin!" exclaimed the master. "I didn't know you were interested in such questions."

"I read, sir, and I use my mind. Also, I meet people and hear what is going on."

"Tell me what you hear, Bodkin. Is there going to be any trouble soon?"

"Well, sir, if I knew, I would gladly tell. But one man's guess is as good as another's."

IV

If Henry Bodkin had stopped there, he would have been a wise butler, and might perhaps have lived happy ever after. But he had a past that was against him; he liked to think, and he liked to talk, and he had an idea in his head just then that pressed for utterance, and secured it. Said he:

"If you won't think me presuming, sir, I will tell you what I would do, if I were in your position, and wanted to keep out of trouble when it comes."

"What would you do?"

"I would make friends with the unemployed, sir, instead of showing that I was afraid of them."

"Afraid of them? Oh, now really, Bodkin!"

"I am not speaking for myself, sir, please understand. I am saying what people think."

"You mean they are talking about me?"

"Well naturally, sir, they talk about this tower. You have a dozen men working on it, and of course these men know what it's all about, and they don't keep their mouths shut when they go home. It's all over town that the rich up in the hills are building fortifications and putting in machine-guns for fear of the revolution that is coming. Of course that makes a lot of people think about revolution that would have laughed at the idea if it wasn't for the tower."

"Dear me!" thought Peter Parley; but he tried to conceal his agitation. "And what would you have done in my place?"

"Well, begging your pardon, sir, look at Mr. Theophilus Fleming. He has a big estate like you, and he's in the utilities business, which is always before the public, taking their money, and shutting off the service if they don't pay. It is not a popular business, as you can see. Yet Mr. Fleming has managed to make the people think he is human and friendly, and they like him."

"What has he done?"

"Well, sir, there's that Self-Help Exchange. He has given them some assistance; he talks to their people; I've been told he likes to go out where the gangs are working and sit and watch them."

"That's his idea of diplomacy, is it?"

"I can't say about his idea, sir, but that's the way it

works. The people say he's a kind old gentleman, he really cares about the poor, he's doing his best, and so on. It makes all the difference in the world, when you know a person and have talked with him."

"And you think that will be a protection to him? "

"They've got something over a thousand men in that place, and if you count the women and their relatives and friends, it makes a great influence. What they are saying goes over the whole town."

"You think they are the people who will lead the revolution? "

"Oh, I wouldn't say anything like that, sir. I doubt if many of them ever heard of the idea. But if trouble should come, they'd have a lot to say, because they are organized, and all the working-people know them."

"They tell me they're a bunch of free lovers, Bodkin."

"I don't think I would believe that, sir. They're decent people, above the general lot. The average young working-man is far from being a saint; you know about the cribs in the big cities, we have such places right in this town. But when a man comes into the co-op, he stays in one place, and he works hard, and has something to live for. If he meets a woman there that he likes, well, that's one woman, and not a whole string of them."

"But they don't trouble to get married, eh? "

"A lot of them haven't got the two dollars cash for a marriage licence, sir."

"You seem to know a great deal about this place, Bodkin."

"Well, sir, I hear people talking; they talk about that co-op a lot."

"You have been to the place? "

"A few times, sir. I hope that does not displease you."

"Well, I must say that I am startled by the news. All my information is that the movement is a very dangerous one, indeed just another camouflaged form of Red propaganda."

"I hope you won't think me presumptuous, sir, but I have seen no signs of anything of the sort."

"It may not be known to the people you have met; they may be innocent dupes. But concerning the leaders there can be no question. One of them is an ex-convict, with a long record as a Communist agitator. Another member is now

the Communist party organizer of this city, a notorious man who calls himself by the name of Peck, but really is a Russian Bolshevik agent."

"Yes, sir, I have heard about him."

"You met him, perhaps?"

"No, sir, I am quite sure I haven't."

"Bodkin, I have to tell you that it is intolerable to me that anyone should come and go between such places and my home. I do not agree with you that one can work upon the gratitude of such people; they are animated purely by envy and hate; their programme is to murder us in our beds and seize our property. They carried out such wholesale slaughter in Russia. Such people are to be regarded as mad dogs."

"Yes, sir; I suppose so, sir."

"Bodkin," continued the master, sternly, "it is my duty to say that I am wholly unwilling for anyone in my employ to have any connection with that place. I expect and require your promise that you will have no further dealings with them. If you break that promise, it will be taken as your resignation from my service."

"Very well, sir," replied Bodkin, humbly.

"You may take away the table tennis. This conversation has destroyed my interest in games."

"I am very sorry, indeed, sir"—again humbly.

V

But when Henry Bodkin thought it over, he did not feel so humble. On the contrary, he felt his personal liberty infringed, and his dignity as a citizen insulted. He sold Mr. Snell his time, but he did not sell his conscience or his mind; and what he did with his spare time was his own affair, not his master's.

The war had pulled Bodkin up by the roots, and made him into an adventurer. He had stayed in England, and then moved on; now he had stayed for a long while in the service of Parley's Pellets, and all of a sudden he realized that he was tired of it. He found himself thinking thoughts about his master, and his circus-rider lady, and their circus children—thoughts which were wholly improper for a butler in the English tradition.

Bodkin was forty; which is said to be the dangerous age

for men as well as women. Was he going to admit that he was old, and that his life was over? He had saved his money, and had some in the bank. Why shouldn't he have a fling before he died?

He hadn't been especially interested in the co-op up to that moment; but now, somehow, it appeared a desirable and important institution. Bodkin had read in the paper that a visiting English novelist had expressed interest in the California self-help movement, and had promised to visit the exchange and speak there. Bodkin had read a book of this man's, and was suddenly seized with a desire to renew his English memories; to hear the delightful gentleman's accent, hear somebody say "Rahly?" again. He decided that he would attend that lecture if he died for it.

Next morning, after the ritual of the eggs—no strawberries this time!—and after the morning paper had been read and the mail glanced through, the perfect servant took his stand before his master and coughed respectfully. "Pardon me, sir, but may I speak to you for a moment?"

"What is it, Bodkin?"

"I am regretfully obliged to offer you my resignation from your service, sir."

Just like that—a knockout! And of course it staggered Peter Parley. "Well, really, Bodkin"—not "rahly"!—"What's the matter?"

"I am afraid that I am no longer able to give you complete satisfaction, sir, and therefore I wish to resign. Of course it will be at your convenience, sir—I mean, I will wait until you have found the right man to replace me."

"I'm afraid that won't be so easy, Bodkin."

"Thank you, sir, for the compliment."

"What's this all about, Bodkin? Is it the talk we had yesterday?"

"Since you ask me, sir, I answer yes, sir. I feel that what I do in my off time is a matter for my own conscience, sir."

"The devil you do! You think that any employer is going to let one of his household servants associate with the Reds in his off hours?"

"I hope that you won't insist upon my discussing that, sir. It would be most unbecoming of me to argue the point."

"And so you want to quit me cold! Have you thought of the risk you run in giving up a good job in times like these?"

"I have decided to take a chance, sir. I have very good references, as you know."

"Do you expect to have a reference from me?"

"I hope so, sir. I am sure that when you think it over, you will realize that I have done my full duty by you."

"I am not at all sure that I should give a recommendation to a man whom I have discovered to be associating with the Reds."

"Pardon my presumption, sir, but it is the fact that you did not discover anything. I told you in a conversation which you yourself invited; and I have certainly not admitted ever meeting a Red—at least never that I knew to be a Red. Anybody may have met some without knowing it."

"And so, you are leaving me because you wish to go on associating with those people?"

"I have not said that, sir—if you will pardon me. I said that I do not feel that I, a well-behaved and mature man, should be told where I may go in my time off. But I was discussing at the moment whether or not I have a right to expect a reference from you, sir. I point out that never in my years of service have you expressed anything but satisfaction with my work; and I am now giving notice in an entirely respectful and proper manner, and offering to give you time to replace me."

"All right, all right, Bodkin," said the master, irritably. "I suppose you are entitled to a reference. It's going to be devilish inconvenient for me. My wife and I have come to depend upon you."

"I am truly sorry to inconvenience you, sir. I would offer to suggest someone to take my place, but I fear that the person might be an object of suspicion to you."

"I will find someone," said Peter Parley, with the hauteur he should have manifested sooner. "You may leave at once, if you so desire. I will give you a cheque covering the balance of this month of January."

"Thank you very much, sir. I will leave at once. Would it be convenient for you to write the letter now?"

"All right, as you wish. But I want it clearly understood—there's to be no publicity about this, and no talk about me and my family among these Reds or near-Reds or whatever they may be that you choose to associate with."

"Oh, sir, I am distressed that you should think it necessary to say such a thing to me. I have my professional pride. I assure you that never in my life have I discussed your family with any outsider, and nothing could induce me to do such a thing. I have only the kindest memories of my life in your establishment, and I desire that you shall always have cause to think the same way of me."

"All right, then. We part friends. And I'll say that I'm damned sorry to have you go."

"I thank you again, sir. I will say that if the revolution should come—which God forbid—I will do all I can to be of service to you, and perhaps after the revolution we may meet under happier circumstances."

"Ahem!" said the proprietor of Parley's Pellets, flushing, and not knowing whether he should be angry or what.

"Stranger things have happened—in Russia and other countries, sir," said the perfect butler.

VI

Henry Bodkin was sitting in the personnel office of the Self-Help Exchange of San Sebastian. He would have preferred to stand, but the gentleman in charge had told him to sit, and he sat. The gentleman in charge was Bodkin's age, but rather small and bald-headed; an earnest-looking gentleman, wearing large horn-rimmed glasses. He was explaining to the applicant the conditions under which membership was granted in the co-operative.

"You must understand, Mr. Bodkin, that what we are able to do for ourselves is in the nature of supplementary activity. We have only a little equipment, and we cannot make it possible for our members to support themselves entirely."

"I understand that, sir. I am fortunate in having a little money saved up."

"Why do you wish to join the Exchange?"

"Well, sir, I attended a lecture last evening, and was interested in the questions that were asked. I like the looks of your people, and want to know more about what you are doing."

"Do you understand the principles of co-operation?"

"I cannot really say that I do, sir; but I am prepared to learn. You see, sir, I have been a butler ever since the war,

first in England, and then here, and I am a little tired of doing what other people tell me. I would like the experience of being my own man for a while."

Mr. Thomas Cullen smiled. "That is understandable," said he. "Pardon me if I tell you that we don't address each other as 'sir.'"

"No, sir—that is, no, I suppose not. It is a habit which I shall have to unlearn."

A young lady had entered the room during this conversation. She now broke in: "Did you say you were a butler?"

"Yes, madame," said Bodkin; and at the same time he rose and bowed respectfully.

"This is Mrs. Soren," said Mr. Cullen. "Mr. Henry Bodkin."

Mrs. Soren shook hands with him. A lovely person to meet, so young, so jolly-looking, and kind; she had pink cheeks, and a saucy nose, and soft brown hair—to look at her would move even the heart of a butler.

"You have come to save our lives," said she. "We need a butler in this co-op more than anything else in the world."

"Indeed, madame?"

"We have to give a supper party, to entertain half the swells of San Sebastian, and we are scared out of our wits."

"Well, madame, that is exactly in my line, and I have no hesitation in saying that I can be of service to you."

"Hurry up, Tom, and get him registered, and I'll take him over to the Grubshop. We have to make up our minds about the menu."

"I have been accustomed to take full charge of such problems, madame."

"Ah, yes, but you had charge accounts, while we have hardly any money at all."

"I assure you, I have been poor, madame. I was raised on a small farm in Missouri, and we had drought and grasshoppers. The menu will be adjusted to your purse, and my own services will be free of charge."

"We don't let anybody do that, Mr. Bodkin, we all share alike. You will be paid on points; and out there in the commissary you will see the foods we can get on points this time of year: cull oranges and green lemons, and walnuts, and bay leaves. We have all learned to grow fat on bay leaves in the winter-time. To-morrow we are promised a load of cabbages."

"Well, madame, I once knew a Russian chef who claimed that he could prepare a seven-course dinner out of white and red cabbages, but I regret that I did not learn the art. We shall do the best we can, and trust that the swells will take the precaution to pick up a snack at home before they come to our supper. I have known them to do that many times."

VII

Bodkin advised a cold buffet supper; that was less pretentious than a hot meal, and it was better form to attempt less, and do that well. Baked ham was the safest thing—the sugar and cloves were ornamental, and cost little. Bodkin himself would do the carving, and the swells would file by him, and many would recognize him, and that would make them feel more trustful of the food. They would have potato salad, the cheapest form of bulk; Bodkin knew certain touches which would relieve the delicatessen atmosphere and flavour. Celery was cheap, and good if well washed; olives were safe, because, while not cheap, very few of them could be taken. The swells should be trusted to help themselves, because that way they would take less than otherwise.

There should be finger-rolls; they were delicate, and could be served hot—really hot, insisted Bodkin, nothing was less tolerable than half-warmed-over bread. For dessert they would have an ambrosia—oranges were cheap, and labour plentiful to prepare them. The bakery could display its skill with sugar cookies, very thin; the swells liked a lot of circumstance about their food, and a little would go a long way, provided it was good. Needless to say, everything must be spotlessly clean—really they would be judged by that more than anything else. How many times had Bodkin heard them say at dinner-tables: "Well, the poor might at least keep clean."

"You should have asked them, 'Why?'" said Mrs. Soren.

"I was not free to ask anything," replied the butler. "Now, I fear it is too late."

"You may have a chance some day," said Maisie. "After the revolution, *they* will be poor."

Maisie was fascinated by this newest acquisition to the co-op. She had seen many butlers in her early life—her own dear uncle, the lawyer, had had one, until he lost all his money; but never had Maisie known a butler as a human

being, or had a chance to find out what was going on behind the mask of impassivity. It was like talking to a bronze image in a Buddhist temple.

Maisie found out that Bodkin was fresh from the home of Parley's Pellets and the Parley Pellet Period; and of course she knew about the tower of refuge which was under construction on that estate. She wanted to hear all about it, and after she had won the confidence of the butler, he told her the story of how he had given up his position, and why.

"Oh, dear, this is just too funny!" said Maisie. "I have really the grandest thought! Let's get Mr. and Mrs. Snell to come to our supper party! I won't die happy unless I can see you serving cold ham and potato salad to them in our Grubshop."

"I'm afraid it wouldn't be possible to arrange that, Mrs. Soren. He's really afraid of this place."

"What'll you bet me I can't arrange it, Mr. Bodkin?"

"Well, madame, I have never been a betting man, but I would enjoy seeing it myself, and I don't mind saying that if you can contrive it, I'll put up ham and potato salad for all the members of the Self-Help Exchange."

That was a real challenge, and Maisie put her wits to work. The persons she had in mind to use were Mr. and Mrs. Theophilus Fleming. Bodkin said that the Flemings had never had anything to do with the Snells, and doubtless looked down upon them as from a mountain-top. Maisie said: "But the old gentleman has the devil of mischief in him, and if we can get him to get his wife to invite Mrs. Snell, don't you suppose she would come, and bring her husband?"

"Yes, madame, I must say, if that could be contrived, Mrs. Snell would take her husband to supper with Beelzebub, and without a return ticket."

Maisie told her husband about it; and of course Sig was glad to provide a little harmless entertainment for the Fleming family. He went to see the old gentleman in his office—he had the entrée now, because he never went unless he had something worth while. He told Old Thee about Peter Parley's butler, and how he had presumed to criticize the defences of the estate from the point of view of an artillery expert, and had resigned rather than give up his right to attend a lecture by a visiting English novelist. When Old Thee heard how Bodkin had now become the butler of the Self-Help Exchange, and it was

proposed to lure the proprietor of Parley's Pellets to be waited on by him there, he burst out laughing. That is the kind of humour enjoyed in high society, because it depends upon the assumption of their superiority to other people.

Old Thee shook his head when it was suggested that his wife might be the one to do the inviting; he didn't think she would consent. But after he had laughed a bit more, he got warmed up, and said, by gorry, he would *make* her do it! Or else his daughter Genevieve—who had been Mrs. Whiteing, and had recently been transformed into Mrs. Barry Rogers.

To make a long story short, Thee went home, and told the story to his wife and daughter, who behaved just as he had. Mrs. Pat said no, and then she said, well, and then Genevieve said, "Oh, mother dear, loosen up a bit!" Mrs. Pat objected that if she once made a contact with those dreadful people, they would be calling at her house. Thee said they would be mad when they found out about the joke; but Mrs. Pat insisted you couldn't offend people of that class.

But the more they talked about it, the more they were amused; and Mrs. Pat went to the phone, and asked if Mrs. Weenie Snell was in. Yes, she was in; and Mrs. Pat, all honey and cream, said that she was interested in a charitable enterprise which she thought might interest the Snells, and would Mr. and Mrs. Snell like to come with her at seven o'clock next Thursday evening and find out about it. Mrs. Weenie, all sugar and goo, said that she would be just too happy, and she was sure her husband would be just too happy also.

When she hung up the phone old Parley growled that of course they wanted to get some money out of them. But the ex-circus lady replied: "My God, what's our money for, if not to meet the Flemings?" And what could the proprietor of Parley's Pellets answer to that?

VIII

Of course Mrs. Pat couldn't resist telling one or two friends, in strict confidence; and Genevieve told all her friends in strict confidence. There was a great access of interest in the co-op, and several ladies called up to ask if it would be all right for them to bring some friends—they would be glad to pay for the supper if they might, and if not, they would make a donation for the unemployed. Yes, if Maisie Soren could devise social

stunts like this one, she would get herself and her Self-Help Exchange into the Social Register!

Practically all the "swells" who came to that supper knew that the Thee Flemings had broken the ice which had stood intact for twenty years, and were bringing the Parley Snells to the supper, for the fun of having them waited on by the butler whom they had fired—the story had grown somewhat in the telling—because they had found that he visited the same co-op. Of course this set everybody to arguing about the co-op, was it really Red, and was it really dangerous; it was an excellent piece of propaganda.

Henry Bodkin was forewarned, and was the most correct and impassive of butlers who ever served the unemployed. He diligently carved the baked ham, and as the guests filed by, he knew most of them, and said: "Good evening, Mrs. Hallam. How do you do, Mr. Hallam? Very well, thank you, Miss Osgood"—and so on. Of course he said: "Good evening, Mrs. Snell," and "How do you do, Mr. Snell?" and added: "I am pleased to see you again"—and without the trace of a smile.

It was a subtle and refined jest, and its enjoyment by the guests was subdued and polite. The Parley Snells ate their baked ham and potato salad, and hot finger-rolls, and ambrosia and sugar cookies like everybody else. A simple meal, and becoming to poor people. The tablecloths and napkins were of paper, but they were spotless, and so were the hands and the aprons of the waitresses. Yes, the poor were keeping themselves clean, and there was no fault for the rich to find with them.

After the supper the tables were moved back, and the six portions of the big round table were brought in and joined together. The section co-ordinators, now twenty-three in number, took their places, and held a session of the co-ordinating assembly; that is to say, they discussed the affairs of the co-op and decided their day's problems, so that the social and business leaders of the community might see exactly what their procedure was. It was supposed to be spontaneous, but of course it had been planned, and certain important matters had been saved for discussion on that particular evening.

For example, the Self-Help Exchange was in urgent need of another dragsaw. Mr. Thee Fleming had let them have one out of the Quinn Hardware on credit, and they had paid him

with work, and he had acknowledged that their work was honest, and had been their friend ever since. Bill Mase now took a commitment to interview Mr. Fleming in the morning, and point out to him that, whereas they had had only three hundred members at that time, they now had thirteen hundred, and could make several thousand if they had the tools for them to use. Mr. Fleming was to be asked to provide another saw, and to think up some jobs that the co-op could do in return. It was a clever little stunt, and everybody laughed, including Old Thee; even his wife and daughter smiled.

Then Mr. Hulbert Osgood, who was a banker and an active Republican politician. Charlie Day took a commitment to interview Mr. Osgood and ask his influence in persuading the state relief authorities to change the practice that was undermining the co-op and threatening to destroy it. The discussion made clear to those present how the best members of the institution were continually being drawn away by the "work relief" organizations. It became apparent that this was the real purpose for which the "swells" of San Sebastian had been invited to a party. Various of the co-ordinators explained the cruel waste of the relief policy, and asked the influence of their friends to try to have it changed.

A little bald-headed man with horn-rimmed spectacles, co-ordinator of the headquarters section, told his own experience. He had been with the co-op from the very first, in fact he and Charlie Day and Pete Shaver, co-ordinator of the wood section, were the three men who had planned it. He, Thomas Cullen, had been the head of a broker's office in Kansas City, and when the office had closed he had had to give what little he had left to his family. He himself was utterly destitute, and forced to live on relief; and recently he had received an order to report for pick and shovel duty on one of the WPA projects. Imagine him, a rather frail man well in his forties, doing that sort of work on a sewer job—and when he had real skill and training for selecting men and running an office, and had spent more than three years learning the business of a self-help co-operative, getting to know every one of a thousand or more workers and their aptitudes or lack of them!

A little comedy relief—one of the men at the round table brought up the subject of the condition of the barn and stables belonging to Mr. G. T. Hallam, a polo-playing brewer who

was present. The buildings were judged to be in need of painting, and one of the contact section took a commitment to see Mr. Hallam in the morning, and urge it as his civic duty to let the Self-Help Exchange do this work, in return for the use of a vacant tract of land on which they would plant early spring vegetables. Everybody laughed, and Mr. Hallam said, all right, it could be considered a bargain.

Then came the turn of Mr. Peter Parley Snell, and that was certainly comedy relief. Mrs. Sig Soren, that gay and charming young thing who headed the women's contact section, reported that Mr. Snell was contemplating a good deal of grading and cutting of wood and brush on his estate. Maisie didn't mention that the purpose was to clear the line of fire so that the workers could be shot down in the coming revolution; no, she just suggested that the co-op ought to ask for that contract. In view of the importance of the matter, Charlie Day undertook to handle it personally, and added that Mr. Snell had a great deal of fruit on his place, and probably didn't get much for it, so the co-op would offer to take this fruit for their labour. Somebody started to applaud, and a number of the "swells" joined in—thus telling Mr. Peter Parley Snell how they hoped Charlie Day would get that contract!

IX

The Snells discussed the matter on the way home. They were not sure whether they had been made "guys" of, or whether the great Mr. and Mrs. Fleming really believed in this co-operative and were trying to help the poor. Mrs. Weenie was sure the whole thing had been plotted by Bodkin, for the purpose of ridiculing and humiliating them. But Peter Parley had another theory—might it not be that it was a subtle form of apology by Bodkin, a move to get back his old job? If his former master and mistress could be shown that the co-op really was harmless—

"I must say the place seems all right to me," said the circus rider. "They strike me as decent people, and what they're doing is a lot better than begging for charity."

"Did you notice that young woman named Soren?" inquired her husband. "The one that started the talk about grading our land."

"She's made to be noticed by you men."

"Do you recall the big fellow, that sat next to her—the one that talked about the college?"

"What about him?"

"Well, he's her husband, or her lover, or what. He's an ex-convict, and one of the most dangerous Reds in America. I have his whole record."

"Well, if you ask me," replied Mrs. Weenie, "I think that's all bunk, and you and your tower too. What I say is, I wish we had Bodkin back in our service. That new one you got is certainly a lemon."

Mr. Snell fell silent at that; and after a pause his wife added: "If you think Bodkin has made up a peace offer, you better take it up quick."

The proprietor of Parley's Pellets was forced to assent; and next morning he looked up the Self-Help Exchange in the telephone book, and got Henry Bodkin on the wire. "Bodkin," said he, "that was a pleasant evening we had."

"Thank you, sir," said the ever humble servant. "I am happy to hear you say it."

"And, Bodkin, I have been making inquiries about the Self-Help Exchange, and am pleased to say that I have to revise my opinion of it. It strikes me as a very worthy enterprise."

"Oh, thank you, sir! That is very handsome of you indeed, and all our members will be happy. I am a member now myself, sir."

"Well, that's all right. What I wanted to say is that I withdraw my objection, and I'll be very pleased to forget the past, and have you return to your former position."

"Oh, really, sir"—the perfect servant was staggered, and had a hard time concealing the fact. "Really, sir, I am deeply appreciative, and hope you will believe the fact."

"Then it's all right, Bodkin?"

"Oh, sir, I am desolated—but you see, I have made other commitments."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, sir, I have started to get an education."

"The devil you say! What do you want with an education?"

"Really, sir, one can't always say, exactly. An educa-

tion changes one's point of view, and also one's opportunities, so one can decide better afterwards than before."

"I never heard of such a thing. Where are you going?"

"Right here, sir, in San Sebastian. I have enrolled in the college—you heard about it last night, sir—the College of Reciprocal Economy."

"Well, I'll be damned! A man of your age?"

"That doesn't matter, sir, we have one pupil who is seventy-eight, sir. One can always learn."

"And what are you going to learn?"

"Well, sir, I am taking a course with Professor Michael Sperry on Social Classes in the Greek City-States; and one with Mr. William Mase on Social Protest in American History; and one with Dr. Sudbury on Mutual Aid as a Factor in Evolution."

"What good do you imagine it will do a butler to know about stuff like that?"

"It's hard to say, sir, what I may do in future. I may decide not to be a butler any more. I am to help with the restaurant of the co-op, and if I make good they may put me in charge."

"And you'd be satisfied to run a wretched little joint like that—after the homes you have lived in?"

"But you see, sir, the homes belonged to others, while this little joint will belong to me—that is to say, along with all the other members. You can't realize what the difference is till you try it, sir. It would give me great happiness if you would come down and study this institution and see what it is doing for people; it is really a most remarkable thing. I am quite filled with enthusiasm, if you will pardon me for an expression so inappropriate to my former station."

X

It was what Lenin, a realistic thinker, had meant when he said that every servingmaid should be capable of running the state. Here was a servingman who had undergone a genuine metamorphosis; he had burst his butler's integument, and emerged a new creature—no one could be sure just what, until his wings had had time to dry and strengthen.

Henry Bodkin was literally trembling with curiosity and excitement, like a child going to its first party. Everything about this co-operative was wonderful to him; all these poor people, whom he had been taught to despise most of his life, had suddenly been transformed into workers of miracles; they were all so kind, so warmhearted, so full of zest! Their leaders were so wise—truly as if they were seraphim come down from the sky for the purpose of answering Henry Bodkin's questions, and explaining things which had hitherto been a mystery to him.

Bodkin had lived among the great ones of the earth for seventeen years now; he had listened to conversations at dinner-tables and in drawing-rooms, conducted by the richest and most august, and he knew what they knew, or rather what they didn't. They had made a war, and didn't know how or why they had made it. They were now in process of making a still worse one, and didn't know anything about that. They had made a depression, and didn't know how they had done it or how to undo it. They were making national bankruptcy and inflation, and didn't know they were doing that, nor how to stop it.

But here were people who really did know. Yes, they did; they could answer any question you could think of! All day long, among these people, you heard discussions; they were facing facts, working out solutions—and, more than that, doing something about it! Bodkin had heard a lot about the revolution, and he had been told that it meant mobs, and throwing brickbats and bombs, and burning down the homes of the rich. But here was the revolution, happening right now, and Bodkin saw that it was people changing their minds. And no one was revolting faster than he!

It might be a college professor, like Sperry, who told Bodkin about the whole history of mankind. Or it might be a technical man, who had spent his life building up powers of production, and told why they were not used. It might be a self-educated workingman like Sig Soren—or even one who had no apparent education, like Pete Shaver, co-ordinator of the wood section. Talking to the dragsaw crew, Pete would remark: "You guys worked all your lives for the boss, and when you got through he owned the tools and you was on the scrap heap. But when you work in a co-op and you get a tool, it's your own, and you have the benefit of it, and no-

body can take it away from you." The gang would answer: "By God, that's right! We poor stiffes never had the sense to see it!" That was the revolution!

Bodkin went to a lecture in which Charlie Day discussed the powers of production developed by modern society; the ex-butler listened as to a tale of enchantment, beyond any of the dreams of Aladdin. Right here in this co-op was an engineer who was part inventor and owner of a process which would revolutionize the lumber industry. Instead of using only sixty per cent of the tree as at present, this process used roots, branches, leaves and all; the material was reduced to a pulp and squeezed out like toothpaste, and moulded into any form. But could you get such a process applied under the profit system? It would wipe out an investment of a billion and a half dollars on the Pacific coast alone; and what bank was going to finance such devastation? Charlie declared that there were tens of thousands of inventions being withheld by vested privilege, because they involved the scrapping of equipment, and because the existing plant was already too big for profit.

Charlie told about a place in the state of Washington where there were all the makings of a great steel industry: the best cretaceous bituminous coal, rich iron ore, and lime in plenty. But would the steel trust ever permit that possibility to be developed, and the West to be freed from its grip? Never while the profit system endured, and steel kings were the rulers of America. Such a development must be the goal of all the people, organizing to take their country away from the exploiters and build a new co-operative industry.

Charlie gave glimpses of what such a world would be like. For the first time it would be possible to utilize the wonderful powers of production which modern science had developed. Production would be controlled, no longer by the masters' need for profit, but by the demand of the consumer, who would be also the producer, and the only one who profited by production. In this new world there would be no such thing as want or insecurity. Men would no longer waste their efforts competing with one another, but would devote their efforts to harnessing the forces of nature. Machines would do all the hard and rough work, and production would be nearly automatic, so there would be plenty of leisure for everybody. Every child born into this world would have a

full opportunity to develop its talents, and science and art would be open books to the whole human race.

All that was possible; the people could have it whenever they chose to stretch out their hands and take it. And Henry Bodkin listened, and stretched out his hand and took his share. When Charlie Day described some new machine, pouring out wealth—one heavy press which could stamp out enough steel frames of automobiles for the people of the entire United States—a cotton-picking machine which would do the work of a thousand field hands—Henry Bodkin would say to himself: "And me sorting the eggs! Me putting the dates on them with purple ink!"

It was the revolution!

CHAPTER XVI

DISINTEGRATION

I

GRACE MEGRUE was arguing with the lady in the relief office. The lady wore a tight-fitting black dress, and sat very stiff and straight and looked at you through gold-rimmed pince-nez. Mrs. Berry was her name, and she was a good deal like a schoolmistress dealing with refractory pupils. Among the co-oppers she had the reputation of being very "mean," but perhaps that was just because they wanted things which Mrs. Berry could not give. All bureaucrats have "superiors."

Grace Megrue was of Irish descent, and had golden hair which was naturally curly; but she kept it bobbed close, because her mind was on her work and she wanted to keep it there. She would have been pretty, except that she was so extremely pale and thin. Just now she was wrought up, but was trying to keep her temper—at least until she was sure she was not going to get what she wanted.

"But, Mrs. Berry," she pleaded, "I have never done any sewing in my life!"

"I have explained that that is not your responsibility. You will be taught whatever is needed."

"But what a waste of energy! I have spent ten years

learning to be a competent stenographer, and you order me to a sewing job."

"It is unfortunate that we have no office vacancies; but we do have a call for people to sew."

"It seems to be that way all the time, Mrs. Berry; there are demands for the people in the co-op, and it's always for something like this, that they don't know a thing about. The result is, our group is going to pieces."

"I wish very much that I was in a position to make special provision for members of the Self-Help Exchange, Miss Megrue. But I am not the one who decides policies."

"What do they do, I wonder? Do they just draw the names out of a hat?"

"I don't think we will get anywhere by discussing that question, Miss Megrue."

"In other words, I just have to take what's handed to me—no matter what ruin it may mean in my own life. For two years I have been Mr. Day's secretary, and I have a thousand details in mind that help him, and take burdens off his shoulders. Now somebody reaches in and takes me by the collar and jerks me out, and I'm set down at a sewing job."

"I think you are becoming somewhat overwrought, Miss Megrue," said the relief lady, severely. "I have much work to do this morning."

"Mrs. Berry," demanded Grace, "has it never occurred to you that you also are a wageworker?"

"Are you trying to insult me?"

"I am trying to point out to you an economic fact. I know that salary workers feel superior to humble wage earners—just because they get their pay once a month instead of once a week. But you, too, may be out of work someday, Mrs. Berry. Just suppose the Democrats should carry the state of California next time, and fire this whole relief setup—what then?"

"Really, Miss Megrue, you are committing an impertinence."

"Put it away in your mind and think it over—you are just as much exposed to insecurity as any of us poor people you sentence to misery and defeat. We've got one fellow in the co-op now who worked to elect your Republican governor, and had the governor's personal promise of a job; but now the governor doesn't know he exists. When your turn comes,

you may be sorry you destroyed our co-op."

"I repeat, Miss Megrue, I have no thought of destroying your co-op."

"The law says that you are presumed to know the consequences of your actions. You have a thousand families at your mercy, and you know they cannot exist without a little real money every day—they have to have carfare, and now and then a postage stamp, and money to pay for gas and light. They are not allowed to get money through the co-op, because the government conditions its grants on the agreement not to sell products in the open market. You tell the poor devils that the only way they can get cash is to take a job outside the co-op—and then you say you have no desire to hurt the co-op!"

"Really, Miss Megrue," said the now furious lady, "I must say that if such talk as this is what they teach you in that place, it is no misfortune that it is not thriving."

"Aha!" cried the girl, wildly. "So you've said it! The cat is out of the bag! We teach people to be independent and self-supporting, and you want them to be paupers and bootlicks and humble dogs. You take a girl that has shown you a doctor's certificate that she has a heart murmur, and cannot stand steady work——"

"How do you stand being a stenographer, if you faint all the time, as you say?"

"Because they are considerate of me, they let me work when I feel able to, and go and lie down when I need a rest. But if I am made to work when I can't work——"

"You have no need to worry about that, Mrs. Megrue. If you are ill, you will receive hospitalization."

"In other words, you propose to break me down, and then try to patch me up again. That is your idea of wise handling of public money!"

"I have told you before," said the lady, now with venom in her tone, "that you are at liberty to reject this work order if you see fit."

"And go home and starve to death! Or maybe come back and cut my throat in front of your desk! Is that what you want, Mrs. Berry?"

The relief lady pressed a button—three times, a signal. "Miss Megrue," said she, "you will kindly leave my office, and spare yourself the humiliation of being put out."

The door opened, and there entered an able-bodied young man, whose job it was to deal with hysterical cases—several of them every day. Grace got up and walked out, her fists clenched and her nose high in the air.

II

Grace Megrue had a job with the "Associated Charities." She was making shirts for those classified as "indigent," and that was worthy work according to charity standards. These standards had been carried over into relief work, by the same persons who created them. Mrs. Berry had been a "social worker," and so had her superiors, all the way to the top of the FERA and the WPA, whose head had got his training in "social work." According to these standards, the indigents had to have shirts, but not too good ones; so it was all right if they were made by persons who knew nothing about shirt-making. The shirtmakers had to have food, but not too much food, and not too good; just enough to keep them from dying, or so that they would not know they were dying, or that others would not know it.

Grace Megrue was sewing buttonholes. She was sewing very bad buttonholes, learning as she went along; but that again was according to relief standards. The fact that a skilled operator of a power machine could make a dozen perfect buttonholes for every imperfect one that Grace made by hand made no difference according to relief standards, because the purpose was not to make many buttonholes, which would have thrown some real buttonhole maker out of work; the purpose was to keep Grace busy at what could be called work, and thus have an excuse for giving her money.

About one hundred women sat in a large room, making shirts for the indigent. The light was badly distributed, but they could not move, because they were closely packed in. The ventilation was bad, because the room was heated by steam, which warmed the air without changing it. There were always some women with colds, who could not stand the least draught, so it was impossible to keep any windows open. Modern engineers have devised scientific systems known as "air conditioning," and in many offices and factories operated for private profit such systems had been installed; but they were not called for by relief standards, so the poor women

sneezed and coughed, and sent showers of their germs for twenty feet or more.

These conditions might have been improved, but for a basic difficulty which confronted the relief authorities and controlled everything they did. If relief wages were increased, or if work conditions were improved, the workers would prefer relief to private industry. Who would sew shirts in a sweatshop, if he could have pleasant working conditions under the government? Hence the survival of private capitalism depended upon Grace Megrue's being made miserable, and she was.

According to relief standards, the poor might at least keep clean; but they don't, and so the smells were bad in this room. Grace, a newcomer, had a bad light, and being a blunderer she stuck the needle into her fingers whenever she got dizzy. On the third day she keeled over in a faint; and of course they had provided for that—it happened to someone daily. They laid her on a couch, and sprinkled her face with water, and after an hour or so she went back to work. Two days later she fainted again, and the next day she fainted twice.

Charlie Day went personally to see Mrs. Berry about it. He pleaded with the relief lady both on his own account and on account of his secretary, a truly sick woman. But it appeared that Grace had managed to make Mrs. Berry hate her as thoroughly as Grace hated Mrs. Berry. (Such human factors are not supposed to affect relief standards, but occasionally they do.) Mrs. Berry told the chairman of the Self-Help Exchange that she was convinced that Miss Megrue was fainting on purpose; she had consulted medical authority about it, and was informed that many such cases were on record.

So Charlie went to see Barney Bascom of the *Morning Enterprise*. That was the one way you could move the relief people—by publicity. They wanted the poor to starve peaceably and quietly, and when there was a newspaper story the authorities behaved like ants under a stone when the stone is turned over. Charlie, having been a publicity man, knew how to turn over stones.

Barney said he had been ordered to "pipe down" on stories about the unemployed and their troubles; but Charlie replied that it wouldn't be necessary to publish anything, the threat would be enough. So Barney called up Mrs. Berry's superior, and said he had a story about a girl who was trying to outfaint the relief authorities, and Barney thought it would

make an amusing feature if handled right. How many times did relief standards require that a woman should faint? The relief gentleman was in a terrible panic, and wanted to know all about the case. Barney said that Grace had fainted four times so far, but when the gentleman looked it up he found that she had fainted again that morning.

So he ordered Mrs. Berry to classify Grace as "unemployable," which meant that she no longer had to work, but was turned over to the county relief authorities, and would receive a dole of twenty-two dollars a month. That was a goal which many of the co-oppers strove for, because it enabled them to give full-time service to the Exchange. It was like the British Tommies, who aspired to what they called a "cushy" wound, not bad enough to ruin them, but enough to take them out of the trenches.

III

Grace Megrue went back to the co-op, and for a while was quite a heroine, having fainted the meanest of all relief administrators. She was in a novel position now, having cash money, the first she had handled in three years. She could build up her health with good meals at the Grubshop. The charge was now fifteen cents per meal, plus points, and Grace with her dole could have three meals a day, with such unaccustomed luxuries as milk and meat and butter. The only trouble was that she couldn't resist the temptation to invite other hungry girls in the co-op to have meals with her. It was what the charity people called the improvidence of the poor.

Grace had to tell her story many times over; especially the argument she had with Mrs. Berry, and how she had told that severe lady that she, too, was a waged worker, and might some day be out of a job! And that threat to come back and cut her throat in front of Mrs. Berry's desk! "Somebody ought to try that some day," said Thomas Cullen. "It might have a great effect."

Poor Cullen, he had a story of his own, about fights with the WPA people. They had had to give up the attempt to make a pick-and-shovel man out of him; he had broken down and had to be taken to a hospital. Now they had made him a time-keeper, and he spent five days a week thwarting the efforts of "chisellers"—while at the same time knowing that the whole job was a piece of "chiselling." They were burning

weeds on the right of way of a great railroad company; and what was that but the company chiselling on the government, getting its work done free? And at the same time making unemployment by failing to hire men for the customary job! There you had a solution for the problem of the depression, said Cullen—let the government do all the work for the corporations, and let the corporations make all the profits, and everybody would be happy!

The ex-manager of a broker's office had so completely merged his life into that of the co-op that his separation from it had all but broken his heart. He came every night and worked overtime, trying to keep up with his old duties. Since he could no longer attend sessions of the round table, he would question those who had been present, and would study the notes which Susie Adams, the secretary, had written up. All day Saturday and Sunday he was on the job, and when he got the flu, so that he couldn't work on the WPA job, he spent his time questioning those who came to see him, giving them advice about the conduct of headquarters.

The co-op was haunted by old-timers like this; a great deal of its work was done in spare hours, by persons who held two jobs, earning both cash and points. They were about the only members who were able to eat in the restaurant; the rest of its patrons were students and teachers in the college, and doctors and dentists and nurses of the health section. It was astonishing how many people, even of the middle classes, had to consider the price of a meal, and were glad to get simple but good food, served in a clean place—under the supervision of Henry Bodkin, late butler to Parley's Pellets and the Parley Pellet Period!

IV

Herbert Alding had been to Washington again, and had spent nearly two months arguing and pleading with the higher authorities, on behalf of his plan for a chain of self-help co-operatives for the California unemployed. Now he was back again, and this time his lips were not sealed; he was a free man, having resigned his eight-thousand-a-year job. No longer would he be responsible for leading the people to believe that the authorities meant to give production for use to the unemployed, or had any real interest in the idea.

Charlie and Sig and Maisie came to dinner at Mabel's

home, to hear the sorrowful story of Herbert's pilgrimage among the "buckpassers"—his name for the bureaucrats. Nobody could do anything until after election; nobody even dared say a word until after election. But Herbert had the personal conviction that they would never do anything real along the line of plenty for the workers; whatever was done, it would always be bureaucracy, the "social worker" point of view. If power was taken away from the masters of private industry, it would be lodged in the hands of officials, never in those of the rank and file. Herbert had learned a lot during the past two years, and now talked like quite a "radical."

What could they do about it? Again and again they went over the problem; as the tiger paces the cage, and throws its weight against each bar in turn. Americans could not live in a city without some money; that bar stood firm. The only way they could get money was by selling something; and they could not get either grants or loans from the government without binding themselves to sell very little. Nor could they break this bargain; there was, and would always be, an efficient spy service—all the private business of America!

In order to produce anything you had to have tools and land, a capital investment. It had been the idea at the beginning that they would earn this investment little by little, day by day. But how were you going to live meanwhile? You could exist half starved for three years—they had done it; but could you exist three-quarters starved? Above all, could you exist with a perpetual bribe held out to your members—with the government saying: "Stick by the co-op and starve; or leave the co-op and have what you need"? It was the method by which Herbert Hoover and his agents had broken the revolution in Hungary; saying: "Stick by the proletarian dictatorship and starve; or submit to a reactionary dictatorship and have American food and supplies."

No one knew exactly how much capital investment it would take to make one worker self-supporting in modern industry. Private business couldn't answer that question, because it never used its plant to full advantage, but wasted its energies in many forms of blind competition. Would a producers' co-op like the Self-Help Exchange have to have a thousand dollars per member or only five hundred? So far, according to Herbert's figures, the self-help groups in California had managed to accumulate, in part from their own savings and

in part from government grants and loans, about a hundred and twenty dollars per member. The San Sebastian group had done slightly better, having about a hundred and forty dollars per member. But it was not enough; and it was hard to accumulate more, because every dollar you put into a tool was a dollar you took out of the commissary, almost literally out of the mouths of half-starved or three-quarters-starved people.

What was the answer? The Communists had theirs: mass action. Form pressure groups and besiege the politicians and relief officials. Organize. Agitate. Struggle. Get arrested, and train martyrs. The Communists didn't say this last, but it was what they did. They printed leaflets with slogans, always in column, and each followed by an exclamation point, sometimes two or three.

Angus McTeagle and his crowd had a slightly different plan. They would turn the co-ops into agencies of mass panhandling. They would take what they could get, day by day. This movement was apt to be taken over by the Communists, or else to become a racket, the most characteristic phenomenon of the time.

Herbert, as a result of two years testing out the bars of the cage, had a different solution. It would take more time and more patience, but it was, in his judgment, the only one that would be permanent and certain. That was the method of consumer co-operatives. The working-people—and not merely the unemployed ones—must organize and use their purchasing power to build their new world. That purchasing power was the one real thing they had, and if they would direct it intelligently they could starve the capitalist system out of existence.

Herbert had got the vision of the twenty-eight weavers of Toad Lane, in the village of Rochdale, England. Ninety-two years ago they had met, and agreed to starve themselves still further and pool their savings. Out of that had grown the first co-operative built on the "Rochdale system" of charging the market price of goods, and rebating part of the profits to the members, and using the rest for expansion. Voting power on the basis of membership and not investment supplied the democratic control; and on that firm foundation the Rochdale co-operatives had built up the biggest business in Great Britain. They had solved the problem of production for use, by establishing, first a co-operative wholesale, and then one industry after another for the supplying of their demand. When you

had a fixed demand, you had the real basis for production; and so the British co-operatives had coal mines and shoe factories, tea plantations in Ceylon and wheat ranches in Canada.

That was Herbert Alding's answer to the problem of the Self-Help Exchange of San Sebastian. Let the workers—all the workers, including those who were paid by the month as well as those paid by the week—begin with a grocery co-operative, and save the ten per cent margin of profit which that business afforded. At once they would provide a market for surplus products of the Exchange, and the way by which the Exchange could get cash for its members. Let that method be extended to one commodity after another, and let production be extended step by step and hand in hand with consumption.

If government bureaucrats refused financial support for this programme, let the workers resort to co-operative banking, the so-called credit unions. Let the co-operators take their savings out of the private banks, and pool them for the purpose of financing both producer and consumer co-operatives. But always, Herbert insisted, you must rest your structure on the firm foundation of those billions of spending power which the workers had, and of which nothing could deprive them. The amount might be reduced by depressions; individuals might lose their share entirely; but the bulk of the power could not be wiped out, save by a complete collapse of the present system.

The method was slow, yes; but Herbert insisted it would not be so slow as in England, because the technique was now proved and thoroughly understood. In Sweden the co-operatives had broken one monopoly after another—even American monopolies such as General Electric and National Cash Register. They had forced the nationalization of railroads, telegraphs and telephones, electric power and radio, lumber, mining, liquor and tobacco. Americans hadn't taken to co-operation, because every individual had felt so certain of becoming a millionaire on his own; but now the movement was spreading fast—there were six or seven thousand co-operatives in the country, and their two million members spent a million dollars a day for their own benefit instead of for that of big business.

V

These five earnest people spent the evening threshing out such problems; knowing that many thousands of people were trusting them, and would follow the lead which they gave. Sig Soren had had two years in the EPIC movement, and politics stood in the forefront of his thinking; he would never lose that vision of the people of California uniting to take control of their state, and above all the credit power of their state, from the private exploiters and their paid political agents. If only EPIC had won, the business of relief would not have been in the hands of a political machine, its details handled by persons who had no idea of democratic procedure.

That was all right, said Herbert; if Sig thought he could accomplish more by going into politics, he and Mabel would help, as before; but Herbert didn't think he was cut out for a politician, his background was against him, and also his disposition. There was no conflict between the two methods, they should work together like two hands at the same task.

Some of the EPICS were inclined to be hostile to co-ops, believing that they diverted people's time and thought away from political organization; but the Self-Help Exchange had provided a test of that theory, a curious and interesting one. Here was the story of it:

The location of the co-op's industrial centre had not been decided by any political consideration, but by the sheer accident that somebody had noticed an empty warehouse with broken windows, and the owner of this warehouse had been willing to rent it for a year for the sake of repairs and upkeep. The people in the neighbourhood had been ordinary Americans, to whom the word "co-operative" had meant nothing very definite. To this place had come some fifty persons, maybe a dozen of them Socialists, the rest just poor and hungry people, hoping for a job.

For two years the workers had worked, and learned co-operation by doing it; the neighbours had watched and learned by contact with the workers. The co-op, as such, had taken no part in the EPIC struggle; and yet, when the election came, the people of that precinct had gone to the polls and voted about ninety-nine per cent for EPIC candidates. The Self-Help Exchange was EPIC in action, and people who were living EPIC voted it automatically.

Mrs. Maisie Trent Soren had been reading a book about Fascism, and she pointed out that the workers both in Italy and in Germany had built strong co-operatives, and had seen them completely wiped out. Just what power did co-operatives give to the workers, and why had they failed in the Fascist countries?

If Mrs. Pitter and her friend Larry Peck had been there to speak for the Communists, they would have answered that the reason was the lack of revolutionary solidarity on the part of the workers in those unhappy lands. But none of the five persons present that evening believed there was any chance of revolutionary action in America; on the contrary, they believed that Communist tactics offered the one hope of success to Mabel's brother and his reactionary organization.

The Communists had made the mistake of challenging a deadly foe when they did not have the strength to overcome him. Nobody was going to make that mistake in America—at any rate not with the help of Herbert or Charlie or Sig. What was wanted was a programme of orderly change, proceeding under the constitution; thus giving no provocation to violence, but keeping the moral forces of the country on the side of the workers. EPIC offered such a programme in the political field, and had proved it by winning the votes, not merely of the unemployed and the wageworkers, but of the middle classes, the small business and professional men. The programme of consumer-plus-producer co-operatives would do the same thing in the economic field.

There was a new movement for industrial unions, out of which would almost certainly grow a labour party. The farmer co-operatives which were springing up all over the country were already going in for the marketing of gasoline and other products; the message brought by Kagawa was winning the churches to the co-operative movement; the youth movement was strongly for it. The task was to unite all these different groups—not merely for talk, but for action in each community. Wherever there was economic buying power, there was the possibility of putting it to work for the making of brotherhood and mutual service.

VI

Mrs. Mabel Saugus Alding had not accompanied her husband to Washington, because she was expecting the

arrival of a baby. She looked very lovely and maternal, and everybody was happy with her. They could see how proud and well pleased she was as she listened to her husband tell about the plan which they had worked out together—not merely to get a consumer co-operative going in San Sebastian, but to establish a central agency which would promote this movement throughout the state, and help to co-ordinate the different groups. How much surplus could the Self-Help Exchange of San Sebastian furnish to a co-operative store if one were started? How much could other producing groups within trucking distance furnish? How many other co-operative stores were within such distance, and what products were they selling?

Herbert had made the getting of such information one of the "projects" of his bureau, so they were that far ahead. It appeared that there were fifty consumer co-operatives functioning in California, and nearly a hundred credit unions, most of them having been started as a result of the EPIC movement and its defeat. How many were being successful, and how could their growth be helped and their efforts co-ordinated? How many of them could and would patronize a wholesale co-operative? How many would use goods from self-help groups? All these questions were to be studied by the central body, to the setting up of which Herbert and his wife meant to give their time.

Charlie Day had another plan. He wanted to form an organization of the producer co-operatives, and summon a convention of delegates from the eleven Western states to discuss progress and policies. To it they would invite all the relief officials of the various states. Most of these political persons had but a vague idea of what the co-ops were about, and this would give them a chance to learn. It would also be a way to put pressure on Washington. Charlie had the feeling, shared by most Western men, that the future centre of civilization lay on his side of the Rocky Mountains; he looked on the swivel-chair gentlemen of the national capital much as the American colonists had looked on the ministers of His Majesty King George III.

They discussed these plans until midnight. Mabel, who had to take care of herself, was tired and went to bed. The others debated the future of the Self-Help Exchange. All the things they had been suggesting would take time; and

meanwhile, how were the people to live? Was their three years' effort to be thrown away entirely? As matters stood, they faced disintegration. Their capable workers were being drained away; there would be left only the unemployables, and a few idealists who were so fortunate as to have a bit of income. Impossible to build a real producing organization out of this material.

The telephone rang, and Herbert answered. They heard him give an exclamation. "What?"—and then, "Oh, my God! Where? When?" He turned to them with horror in his face. "Tom Cullen has killed himself!"

They started up. Herbert was still listening at the phone. He said: "All right, we'll come." Then he hung up.

"Oh, the poor fellow! He's cut his throat." Herbert told what he had just heard, from young Strubb, of the headquarters staff, who roomed with Cullen. The police had phoned and told him what had happened.

Cullen had chosen the relief office as the place in which to die; and Charlie and Sig and Maisie all knew what that meant. They had heard the story of Grace Megrue's remark to Mrs. Berry, and they understood at once that the former co-ordinator had taken up Grace's idea.

He had gone to the warehouse of the wrecking section and got a small wrecking iron, and with that he had broken into the offices of the relief authorities. The offices were in a residence building, and it had been easy to "jimmy" a window. Cullen had gone to the desk of a certain Mr. Andrews, the man who had signed the "work order" assigning Cullen to a WPA job. The victim of the order had taken out a new safety razor blade and unwrapped it, and made a precise and careful gash into his jugular vein, and then fallen forward across the bureaucrat's desk. Someone had heard the breaking-in operation and notified the police, who rushed the place, expecting to find burglars. Instead they found a man bleeding to death, and when they called the ambulance it was too late.

Oh, the poor fellow! Tears ran down the cheeks of all three of the men, and Maisie broke down completely. Sig ran to her, exclaiming, "Hush! We mustn't wake Mabel!"

They could never forgive themselves for what had happened. Here they had been enjoying themselves, first eating a good dinner, then sitting on Mabel's overstuffed furniture,

chatting comfortably, while that faithful fellow was doing such a terrible thing. They knew exactly what was in his mind, as well as if he had written them a letter. As a matter of fact, he had done that, and they got it next morning; he had had a copy in his pocket, and the newspapers published it. "This is the only way of protest left to a victim of the relief system."

The faithful fellow! Those were the words everybody used about him. He was that type of man who makes his religion out of a daily round of duties. If Thomas Cullen ever thought about anything but making a success of the co-op, no one of his friends had ever known it. He watched every detail of the office; he laid down the daily routine, prepared all the office forms and blanks, looked over the books, "checked" every document. He did not talk very much, only when he had something to say. At the round table he listened, and when he made a suggestion it was accepted.

Now his friends sat numb with grief. They saw in imagination his small but solid figure, the bald head, the face with its earnest frown and large spectacles. To go and shed his blood over a desk must have cost him a pang; for his life task had been to see that desks were kept in order. His blood must have ruined many papers, destined for pigeon-holes in a bureaucrat's office.

Oh, the pity of it! If they had only known, they would have helped him and saved him. It would have been easy for them all to chip in a little and keep Thomas Cullen for the co-op. But there were so many in need, so many calls—how could you answer them all? Seven thousand people had passed through the co-op in the past three years, and probably nine-tenths of them had been in need. With millions starving all over the country, what could individuals do about it?

Now, when it was too late, they would do something. Herbert said he would pay for the funeral; but when they read Cullen's letter, they found that point covered. "Let the county bury me. Save the money for the co-op."

VII

The tragedy cast a pall over the Exchange. It wasn't the first one, but it was the worst; everyone had known

Cullen, he had been the warder at the gate, he had made it his business to know everybody. He it was who first told them what co-operation meant, and laid down the law of brotherhood. They felt that he had died for them.

It cast a pall over the relief offices also. It was not the first of their victims who had committed suicide, but the first who had made propaganda out of it; the others had gone off politely and died in their homes, or in the ocean. But this was a messy death, and a cruelty to the bureaucrats; the office would be haunted, the officials would have less joy in life. In fact, the suicide nearly wrecked the life of young Mr. Andrews, the signer of the work order. It had not been his fault, it was the policy.

The episode drove the Reds nearly wild. Scores of speeches were made on street corners, and in places where the workers gathered. Larry Peck, alias Moskvich, told many times over the story of his own suicide, and what a mistake it was—"Make them pay for your death!" cried Larry. Joe Timmick, old I.W.W., and now leader of the down-and-outs, the dwellers in tin and tar-paper shacks which had formerly been known as "Hoovervilles," and now were coming to be called "New Dealtowns"—Joe Timmick went on the warpath, declaring: "They want us to kill ourselves, but they're going to be fooled—we'll kill them instead!"

Things were growing more and more tense. You could see it in everything the unemployed workers did and said. At the week-end after Cullen's suicide, there was some delay about the cheques for the WPA workers. A hundred men were gathered outside the office, and they were tired and wanted to go home, and the bureaucrats inside made some excuse, none too politely—they were frequently not so polite to the workers as to one another. The men began to growl and curse: what was the matter with the blankety-blanks, that tired men had to stand around all night?

They started yelling; and one of the bureaucrats came out to bid them be quiet. "The man who signs the cheques has been delayed."

"Well, let somebody else sign them!" shouted a voice. There was a roar of approval.

"Have you no gratitude for what the government is doing for you?" demanded the official, not so tactfully.

"Gratitude, hell!" shouted the voice. "They gave

Charlie Dawes ninety million—why should we be grateful for fifty-five a month? ”

The official turned on his heel and went inside. And next moment a crash, and the jangle of glass falling to the sidewalk. A brick had gone through the window—the same window which Thomas Cullen had broken open. His soul was marching on! A shower of stones followed; and the head bureaucrat came running out—the cheques were right there, they would have them in a moment. “ Please, gentlemen, please! ” Much more polite.

The radicals made note of that, you may be sure. That was the way you got prompt service and polite words—send some bricks at them! Joe Timmick took to drawing this lesson in his speeches; and so came another tragedy.

To the shack where the ex-wobbly slept, on a bed made of two packing boxes, came half a dozen men in automobiles in the dead of the night. They broke in the door, no difficult task, since it was made of canvas; they seized Joe and a companion, knocked them over the heads and threw them into the cars. They drove to a wood several miles out of the city, and there stripped them, tied them down, and beat them with ropes and chains until the flesh came off in strips. Then they opened a can of tar and poured it into the wounds, and left the two wretches lying in a ditch.

Joe's friend managed to crawl to the highway for help, and so they were taken to the hospital, where they lay in agony for days. Gangrene set in, and the doctors had to keep the ex-wobbly mercifully full of morphine until he died.

That same night a band broke into Mrs. Jane Pitter's house, looking for Larry Peck. But maybe Larry had been tipped off, anyhow, he was elsewhere that night, and he was elsewhere for many nights thereafter. He took to living an outlaw's life, never sleeping in the same bed two nights in succession. He would turn up mysteriously at meetings, guarded by half a dozen of the huskiest comrades; he would make fiery speeches about the coming of Fascism—or rather the fact that this was it. A fellow had written a book saying that it couldn't happen here, but it had happened already, and the capitalist press kept it secret, and the police pretended they didn't know about it—but let them ask the millionaires up in the hills, who had an organization to put down working-class discontent and keep the wage slaves in their chains!

Larry knew what was going on in San Sebastian; and he knew also what had happened in the past. Larry had been reading history in jail. "Don't worry because the Self-Help Exchange is being undermined," he would tell the members. "The soviets were started in nineteen-five, and they were wiped out, but they came back in nineteen-seventeen, and came to stay—the first time it was just practice. They came because they offered the people the only way to get bread. They had to come! And the Self-Help groups will come again in California—nineteen-forty, or whenever the system cracks again. Next time, the Reds will be in charge—they'll have to be, because they're the only ones that know the way!"

VIII

All these events weighed heavily upon the soul of Sig Soren, man of peace. He, who had lived among rough men, knew how one act of violence provokes another, and how a spark can explode a powder keg. It was unendurable to him, knowing the way of orderly and peaceful change, to see his city and his state choosing the way of war and destruction. He was haunted by the impulse to do something, to speak the right word, before it was too late.

Also he was haunted by the vision of the Self-Help Exchange going to pieces. So many hopes, so many fair dreams had gone into the making of it; and now it was undergoing slow decay! More people dropping off every week, being forced into WPA work, that empty and futile procedure. And when you got below a certain point in the business of bartering labour, you were lost; unless you had a large group, you hadn't enough variety of service to offer, and deals became harder to arrange.

Then, too, the people were losing spirit. No one could fool them as to the odds against them; they lived right at the sources of information. They knew what it meant when their friends were taken out of the co-op, and set to cleaning up for the gas company or the street railway company. They knew that was scabbing on the real workers, chiselling down wages, reducing all wages to the level of relief wages—and at the same time having the city and county and state authorities continually chiselling the amount of relief pay. American labour on its way to the coolie standard!

Misery was increasing on every hand. The transient camps had all shut down, and the homeless men were again sleeping in doorways and under bridges and in empty freight cars. The winters are not so cold in California, but the rains are just as wet as anywhere else. The police were again arresting unemployed workers as vagrants—the old farce of moving them on to the next town. One day there was a hideous story, of several women living in an abandoned icehouse, keeping themselves from starving by promiscuous prostitution in that place. The papers didn't tell how, when these women were arrested, every single one of them was found to be infected with disease.

And the wild children roaming over the land once more—not Russia, but the sweet land of liberty! There was a Federal department supposed to look out for them, but it didn't reach the tenth part. The President had even started to cut down the CCC camps—but the protest of the people had stopped that. Those camps made too much business for the merchants in the nearby towns! But what a prospect for a youth—to spend the best years of his life in a barracks, cutting brush for thirty dollars a month and keep, and with no hope of getting a home or building a life of his own.

Maisie Soren said that apparently the politicians expected an angel to come down out of the skies and hand them a solution of the problem of unemployment. Charlie answered that she was far too complimentary to the officials; their eyes were not on the skies, but on their own political fences, which they were mending; they were "getting theirs," and giving very little thought to the problems of the poor. They were dull fellows without sufficient imagination to realize the suffering about them, to say nothing of thinking out a cure.

The death of Thomas Cullen hadn't accomplished a thing. The bureaucrats hadn't learned—or perhaps it would be correct to say they were not allowed to learn. All over the country the reactionaries were clamouring in their newspapers against the failure of the relief programme, and the New Dealers were trying to make the best showing they could as to the number who had been put at work. If a fantastic affair called a Self-Help Exchange stood in the way of this achievement, it was just too bad for the Exchange.

IX

There came another case, almost the same as that of Grace Megrue. The co-op, after many struggles, had managed to start a nursery school for the young children of the working mothers. The girl who ran this was in very poor health, so much so that she was not allowed to work at nursing in the hospitals; she slept on the floor of the nursery school, and lived on the points she earned, plus a little relief. But now came a WPA order: she was to report to the Salvation Army centre, to do sewing on old clothes. She, too, began to faint; it was another story for Barney Bascom, and before it was over, it might be another suicide over a bureaucrat's desk.

Sig Soren couldn't stand it. It was like sitting still and watching a murder. He came to Maisie, saying: "I want you to take a gamble with me. I have a crazy idea."

"What is it, Sig?"

"I want to go to Washington, and make one more try at getting our loan."

"But what can you hope to do that Herbert couldn't?"

"I don't know. It may be I can put a little more fight into it than he did. I just can't be happy unless I've tried."

It was a serious decision for them both. Sig had put off his Christmas tree cutting, in order to start the college; and all they had left was a little money from the Christmas before. When they had spent that, they would have only the twenty-five a month from Maisie's mother, hardly enough for them to eat on. Maisie would have to join the sewing brigade at the Salvation Army, or Sig would have to go back to his pick-and-shovel days, now twenty years past.

He had the mad idea of crossing the continent by hitchhiking, or in freight trains. But Maisie fought that, it would take too much time, and time was money for the co-op, if not for Sig. A round-trip busfare was seventy-six dollars, and she liked to think she would be sure of getting her husband back. When he objected that this wouldn't leave anything for "eats" in Washington, she said that somebody might invite him to a meal, and anyhow, it would bring down his waistline.

She was ready for the gamble. She would stay in San Sebastian, and do her best to take his place while he was

away. Maisie was growing fast, becoming more sure of herself, and of other people's willingness to trust her. She had been so set on going to college, but never had she dreamed that she might be running a college, and too busy to attend any classes!

Sig didn't want to seem presumptuous to Herbert and Mabel in thinking that he could accomplish anything where Herbert had failed. He put it very tactfully to them; he would go in two official capacities, as "co-ordinator" of the college, speaking on behalf of the grant they had applied for, and as co-ordinator of the contact section, appealing for the hundred and eighty-two thousand dollars which the Self-Help Exchange had requested more than six months ago. Herbert was kind about it, saying it was quite possible that Sig might get on better with the bureaucrats than he, Herbert, had done; the fact that Sig was a workingman, and looked it and talked it, might make the project seem more real to them.

X

There was a good-bye party for Sig Soren, going off to the wars with the bureaucrats. The leaders of the co-op were always glad to have an excuse to throw a party, for it cost nothing but the makings of doughnuts and coffee, and was an excuse to get the people together and cheer them up. Bread and circuses!

So, on a cold and rainy night in March, the co-oppers came swarming to the centre, a few of them in their ageing autos, but many trudging on foot, badly clothed and shod. They sat in an unheated, barnlike place, warming themselves with hope and faith, and later with a hot drink and some old-fashioned dances. Charlie Day made a speech in which he told about the problems they were facing; it had been told before, but the story had to be kept up to date, and repeated over and over—it was so hard to get people to accept explanations in place of food!

Sig and Maisie sat on the little raised stand and looked at these pathetic faces, rows and rows of them, gazing with rapt attention in the not very good light. They were mostly middle-aged and old people now; the WPA projects had taken the able-bodied ones. But they were all workers, begging for nothing but a chance to take care of themselves and restore

the self-respect which is supposed to be the birthright of every American.

Rows and rows of faces, each a separate story of struggle and defeat, of which Sig and Maisie knew the details. Each a separate personality, with human weaknesses, but also with virtues, and with some vision, more or less dim, of human brotherhood and mutual service. That was what Sig talked to them about, that was his genius, to understand the dream which lay in the hearts of these poor and humble ones, and bring it to reality before their mental eyes. Heart-warming it was to look into their care-lined faces, and see the light of happiness and trust awaken in them; to have them come up afterwards, holding out weather-beaten and toil-worn hands to clasp his own.

It was in their eyes a great adventure which Sig was undertaking; a crusade, a pilgrimage on their behalf. He would carry their petition to the Throne itself—for he had told them he was not going to be content with talking to underlings, he was going to try to see the President himself, and tell him about the Self-Help Exchange and what it had done and what it stood for. Few of them had ever been to Washington, but all had seen pictures of the Capitol with its great white dome, and not one but had seen the President on the screen, or heard his warm and confident tones over the radio. To them it seemed an entirely reasonable thing to interview the President; they had no idea in how many cities and towns of America that night people of one sort or another were planning delegations for the same purpose.

There was cheering and hand clapping all through Sig Soren's talk, and a regular ovation when he finished. Lean and hungry little Cristy Jett, man of genius and creator of ballets, leaped to his feet and shouted: "Hey, Sig! You take a message to that Mr. President fo' me!"

"What shall I say, Cristy?"

"You tell him I say to come out here to Californy an' see fo' himself how us folks is livin'."

CHAPTER XVII

WASHINGTON

I

SIG SOREN on his way to see the President. The big bus rolling through a snowstorm; when Sig tried to look out, he saw a white mass of frost crystals. It was a mystery how the driver was able to see ten feet ahead of him. But buses have to keep to the schedule, no matter what happens; if in the effort one now and then goes over a mountainside, there is nothing the passengers can do about it, and no use to think about it meantime.

It was the worst winter ever recorded in American history. One blizzard followed another, and the temperature stayed below zero, and sometimes twenty or thirty below. It was hard to keep the bus warm enough, and Sig wore his overcoat all the time. It was an old and thin overcoat, and when he got out at the rest places, the icy winds stabbed him like knives. He was twenty years away from Alaska.

Pitiful and dreadful sights one saw in the cities, these winter days and nights: poor old men with no overcoats, with not even shirts, but just one garment; hands in their pockets, shoulders hunched, lips blue with cold; shuffling along, looking for a garbage can and a stick to root in frozen food. Pneumonia swept these poor devils away by the thousands, and statisticians were spared the embarrassment of having to include starvation among causes of death.

On the outskirts of the cities you would see a derelict street-car, once used as an "eats" place, and now the home of a score of persons, sleeping on the floor. You would see an abandoned auto, with a stovepipe sticking out of a window; a couple of men slept there, and took turns guarding the treasure. Nobody paid any attention to such sights; the well-dressed and comfortable hurried by—there was too much of it, and nothing one could do. Sig had heard a clergyman argue that poverty was useful, because it begot charity, the greatest of all virtues, in the hearts of men; but evidently it

was possible to get an overdose of the treatment, and develop not charity but callousness.

Sig sat in the bus, with his arms folded across his big chest for greater warmth. His eyes were closed, but not in sleep. Sig was thinking about the job he had to do. Going over and over in mind the list of persons he hoped to see, and the schemes and devices he might use in order to see them. Above all, Sig was rehearsing a speech, the story he was going to tell to each of these men. Everything depended upon that speech, the whole future of a thousand co-oppers and their families. He must know it so well that he could not forget a sentence of it, no matter how frightened he might be. Every phrase must be weighed and tested, for one might turn the tide.

This was the hardest job that Sig Soren had ever tackled in all his life. Washington, he knew, was full of lobbyists and propagandists of a thousand causes; a crusader for reciprocal economy would have need of all the psychology he had learned in mining camps and the forecastles of ships, as well as that acquired in the conduct of a co-op and a college. He tried to imagine what was coming, and lived many different dramas in his mind each day—dramas both of failure and of success. Like Herbert Alding, he had never learned to pray, and did not think of his resolutions and dedications as having anything to do with religion. But the processes of the human soul remain the same, whatever new names are given them.

II

Sig Soren walking the streets of Washington. Those who laid out the city had been used to driving in carriages behind what they called "a spanking pair." Now they had limousines with chauffeurs, or if they were temporary visitors they had taxicabs. Sig Soren had nothing of the sort at his disposal, and would walk long distances for the simplest errand.

The first thing was to find a place to stay. He chose a workingman's lodging-house, and the first night he made the discovery how far he had yielded to the seductions of the leisure class. His bed was full of vermin and this troubled him—as it would not have done in the days when he lived in mining camps and the forecastles of ships. He cleaned himself, and found a better place—at a higher price.

Sig's suit of clothes had not been very good when new,

and now it was three years old, and had not been improved by sleeping in it for five nights. He had only one extra shirt, and that was ragged. In short, Sig looked like a tramp, and his ingratiating smile merely alarmed people, because they were afraid he intended to ask them for a meal. There were so many beggars and bums in the national capital, and many of them had had the wit to adopt a "cause" as a means of getting a bit of food. Sig found that people were uneasy in his presence, and nobody gave him a chance even to start on an eloquent speech.

Herbert Alding had given him letters of introduction to officials. Each had his office in a different part of the city, and sometimes it was difficult to find where any particular office was. The government had set up so many new bureaus, they had spilled over into private office buildings and apartment houses and even the former mansions of the rich; not even the taxi drivers could tell you where to find some particular combination of the alphabet. Sig would be directed to one place, and then be told to go to the opposite part of the city. He walked scores of miles before he was through with Herbert's letters.

In no case did he succeed in seeing the official to whom the letter was addressed. Herbert hadn't helped himself with the bureaucrats by resigning and telling the reason why; the bureaucrats no doubt reasoned it out that anybody Herbert sent was a person of Herbert's way of thinking, and therefore uncomfortable to meet. Secretaries who took the letters looked Sig over, and no doubt reported on the state of his clothes; some underling would come out, obviously with the intention of cutting short his story and getting rid of him as quickly as possible. The formula was that he should write out his application, and it would be considered in due course.

Only one of these various underlings talked frankly with Sig. He was a young "radical" who was earning his living, without selling his soul—or so he was persuading himself. He recognized this visitor as one of his own kind; and what he said was the same thing which Herbert had already brought back to San Sebastian: nothing doing until after November third, and nothing even to be hinted in the meantime.

Sig went to the Capitol, and sat in the visitors' gallery, and was not made happy by what he saw. Congressmen milling

around talking with one another, few of them paying any attention to the debates. The speaker would hammer listlessly with his gavel—at the same time whispering to another congressman behind his hand. Sig was used to the order and dispatch of the round table in the Self-Help Exchange; that had been needed for the affairs of one little industrial group; but here were the affairs of a hundred and thirty million people being decided—and everything betrayed disorder, disillusionment, disrespect. The old order was decaying before men's eyes—and perhaps it had power to carry the new order down with it! That was the tragedy of America.

Sig tried to send a note to one of the congressmen known as a progressive; but he found that his presence in the building had become a matter of interest to the attendants, and they summoned the Capitol police, who took Sig off to a room for investigation. He had various papers with him; a copy of the application of the co-operative, and a letter of endorsement, signed by various leading citizens of San Sebastian, California. The police decided that he was a harmless "nut," and turned him loose to bother those of his own kind among the congressmen.

The money was running low, and Sig was getting hungrier and hungrier. Maisie had been mistaken, nobody invited him to a meal. He decided he would try panhandling, and went out on to the streets with the other bums at night, a black patch over one eye as an attempt at disguise. Before he succeeded in getting the price of a cup of coffee, he was challenged by a policeman, and when he started to run, a shot was fired at him. He was desperate with fear; if he was arrested, his story would be published in the papers, and that would hurt the Self-Help Exchange.

Sig went to a telegraph office and spent his last money sending a wire to Maisie. "Impossible get anywhere without new clothes please wire money." When Maisie got that she went to see Mabel. Poor soul, somebody in desperate straits came to Mabel at least once a day, and she and her husband had only a small part of the money that people supposed; she was kept miserable because she could not do what her comrades expected, and many were bitter against her because they did not believe her excuses. But this time she could not say no, and Maisie wired fifty dollars to her husband.

III

That money turned the tide. Sig spent a morning visiting the secondhand clothing shops—not so easy to find a suit to fit a grandson of all the Vikings. But finally he got a decent-looking suit for \$13.48; also a couple of shirts. With a bath and a shave and a haircut, Sig was a new man. "To him that hath shall be given." He went back to the Capitol, and this time he was able to see several of the progressive legislators, and one of them gave him a courtesy card, which helped greatly.

Presently Sig found himself making his long-rehearsed speech to a senator from New York. Strange as it might seem, this gentleman had never heard of the idea of a barter or exchange co-operative. He was greatly interested to meet a man who had actually helped to make such an enterprise and to run it for more than three years. When this man stated that his Self-Help Exchange had saved the state and Federal governments just about half the cost of maintaining a thousand men and their families, and that the amount saved was nearly as much each year as the total of grants made to the exchange, this senator said it was a most important idea, and might show the way out from unemployment. He acted as if Sig were that angel of whom Maisie had spoken—coming down from the skies to answer a difficult and baffling question!

He introduced Sig to another senator, a multi-millionaire from the automobile business in Detroit. This gentleman was also interested. He was fully aware how the profits of the big corporations had been increased under the New Deal, while the number of workers had hardly increased at all, and total wages has actually decreased. That was surely no solution of the problem; and maybe production for use by and for the unemployed might be the way.

"Mr. Soren," said this harassed senator, "my job has become the running of an employment agency. I receive three hundred letters a day, asking me to put people at work in the government service. Suppose I take two minutes just to read each letter—to say nothing of answering them all—that is a ten-hour day, and how much time have I left to attend to the business of legislation?"

Sig found a chance to apply his psychology, and make

use of his carefully studied eloquence. The College of Reciprocal Economy opened a branch office in the national capital, conducting elementary classes in co-operative procedure among what the newspapers referred to as the "solons." The college even paid part of its way; for several of the "solons" invited Sig to have lunch with them. Unfortunately, he couldn't eat and talk at the same time, at least, not so rapidly and fervidly as he wanted to talk; the half-starved Viking would leave most of the food on his plate, while he poured noble truth of brotherhood and mutual service into the ears of the nation's law-makers.

Presently a suggestion was made. Let Sig draft a bill, providing for government funds to be appropriated for self-help co-operatives. Sig had never even so much as read a bill in his whole life; but he was one of those tutors who could teach anything if you gave them two weeks' start. This time all he had was two hours in the Congressional Library. Then he went back to his lodging-house room and got into bed to keep warm, and with a pad of paper and a pencil he drafted House Bill 11776, which a young EPIC congressman, formerly a school-teacher, proceeded to introduce and have printed. It had a most impressive entitle-ment:

"A bill to diminish unemployment through establishing the supplementary system of production and consumption for the unemployed known as reciprocal economy."

IV

With letters of introduction from various legislators, Sig went back to the offices of the bureaucrats, and this time he was able to see them. One and all they were polite; and almost one and all they had schemes for the improvement of society, about which they were pleased to tell him. With hardly an exception these men and women had learned about the world in college classrooms; they had trustingly absorbed the ideas of professors who had taught them how the capitalist system could be tinkered with and kept running. If any professor had taught that the capitalist system was outdated and ready for the scrap heap, that professor had long since been eliminated from the college.

Sig in his new clothes made a satisfactory audience, and

the theorists explained their theories to him; but as soon as he began to tell his experiences, they would show signs of restlessness. They would tell him that what he was asking was a matter for some other department or division or subsection; or it would have to be referred to some "superior." Sig found out why Herbert had referred to them as "buckpassers."

Sig was now in the headquarters of the WPA, that arch enemy of self-help enterprises. He listened, and learned at first hand what was going on. Fifty people on a "playwright's project" had spent three months at from forty-eight to one hundred and ten dollars a month per person, and had written a one-act play. Nearly a million dollars had been spent on building a cinder block for a building factory in the housing project; and then it was learned that someone had a patent on the process, and the government could not use it; so the factory stood idle. A project was being arranged to pick wildflowers in the spring; in due course, said Sig's informant, they would have a project to plant wildflower seeds in the fall. Hundreds of such projects were forming, and it was impossible to caricature them. Over a billion dollars had to be spent before the election.

Yes, there was money for everything, except to help the people help themselves. Without exception, the bureaucrats were scared stiff at that suggestion; that would look like Socialism, the newspapers would call it Communism—oh, there must be nothing like that! Nothing of lasting import, nothing that looked permanent; because the whole basis of thinking of the administration was that the depression was nearly over, business was on the upturn, prosperity was coming back, and then the debts would be paid off and everybody would be happy. All government offices must help business to improve, all good bureaucrats must think first: "Will this help business?"

There was a head official, Mr. Walter Harkness, to whom all bureaucrats referred the problem of a grant or loan to self-help co-operatives. Sig was determined to see Mr. Harkness; he besieged that gentleman's office, and wore out the secretaries and clerks. No doubt Mr. Harkness had heard all about this wild man from California, and didn't want to waste his time saying no. When a man has a billion dollars to spend in six months, you might imagine that he would have to say yes pretty freely; but the fact was that he

had invitations to spend ten billion dollars, so it was necessary to say nine noes to one yes. Sig came again and again, with more letters of recommendation and endorsement, and each time he would be received by a suave underling, who would explain how urgently and desperately busy a man was when he had to spend a billion dollars in six months.

Sig wrote home to Maisie: "I am going to make an issue of it. He has got to hear our story. Don't be surprised if you hear that I have been arrested. I want to put a headline in the papers: 'Great Dane Barks at Harkness' Door.' I have told a newspaper man about it, and planted the headline in advance."

Sig armed himself for battle in the ancient Biblical style. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God . . . having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness . . . above all, taking the shield of faith . . . the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit."

Thus invisibly equipped, he went into the office, summoned a secretary and announced in a clear voice: "Several thousand people in a city of California are suffering slow starvation, and they have sent me here to plead for them. I have come seven times to see Mr. Harkness, and seven times you have sent me away." (This Bible style, of course, went with the armour which Sig had taken unto himself.)

"But, Mr. Soren—" began the frightened secretary.

"No more buts!" cried Sig. "I am going to see Mr. Harkness this morning. I am not going away until I have seen him. I am not going to hurt anybody, nor threaten to, but I am going to stay, and demand, and keep on demanding, until I have presented the application of the Self-Help Exchange of San Sebastian to Mr. Harkness personally. Tell him he either has to see me, or have me arrested, and the story won't hurt me, but it will hurt him a lot. Don't fail to tell him, because he will surely be sorry if he lets it happen."

"Oh, please, please, Mr. Soren!" cried the secretary, now thoroughly frightened. "By all means, sit down, and I will see what I can do."

V

Sig sat, and the young man vanished, and after five minutes or so he came back. "This way, please, Mr. Soren," said he, politely, and took the "great Dane" into the inner sanctum.

But it was not to the office of Mr. Harkness. No, another underling! This time it was a man whom Sig had heard of; he had written a book on "philosophical anarchism," and now had settled down to life in a swivel chair. Sig understood that he was the one who had been selected to deal with a "radical" who threatened to run amuck. They had all kinds for all emergencies; for, manifestly, twenty-five million people cannot be persuaded to starve without a great deal of diplomacy and skill.

Ellis was the young man's name, and he was an awfully nice fellow. He addressed Sig as "Comrade," and took him on the inside of affairs. "What can we do, Comrade Soren? Two years ago, when this Division of Self-Help Co-operatives was started, we thought the Big Chief was for us; we thought it up to a year ago. Now he has changed his mind. Don't ask me the reason—your guess is as good as mine. All I can tell you is, we wouldn't be surprised if we woke up some morning and learned we had been wiped out. Our funds are restricted, and nobody in this office has any power in the matter. It's orders. It's a 'policy.' What's the good of raising hell with us?"

"You ought to tell the people, and put the responsibility where it belongs."

"We hang on, because there are little things we can do. You know, we gave you small grants; we can keep on pushing and trying, and some day we may come out on top again. But the point is, Harkness is absolutely helpless; it's no good blackening him."

"What I want is to put the case before the public."

"Well, go after the man who is responsible. Go and see the Big Chief."

"Can you get me to him?"

"Good God! I've never seen him, except at a distance, along with a thousand others. This town is a madhouse, and a hundred thousand of the inmates have their thoughts concentrated on one man. Have you tried to get to him?"

"I tried soon after I arrived here; but I had ragged clothes on, and I only saw an undersecretary. If it hadn't been for my papers, I would probably have been put away as a vagrant."

"Can't you get an introduction from someone?"

"I went twice again, each time with a letter from a senator. I saw one of the secretaries. He promised to see what could be done and let me know if it was possible; but of course I knew that was just stalling. The man has not the slightest understanding of what I am speaking for."

"You are referring to Secretary Smith?"

"Yes. He struck me as a completely capitalistic mind."

"Well, Comrade Soren, all the world read in the papers how he was caught at a drinking party along with some of the worst racketeer lobbyists in Washington."

He explained the situation: the President was open-minded, he was susceptible to new ideas—in fact, it was like catching a disease with him. The secretaries knew that, and being one and all for the present system, they made it their job to protect their Chief from exposure. That was why the men with ideas could not get their names before the President, while the big business crowd were taken in to lunch.

"If you could only get to Mrs. Roosevelt now," said Ellis. But Sig shook his head sadly. He didn't know anyone who knew the President's wife.

Ellis explained matters: Poor Harkness, he pleaded, was driven to death, and it wouldn't do the slightest good for Sig to talk to him. He knew the whole story from Herbert Alding. There wasn't a word he could say, except what Ellis had said for him. What was the use of harassing him?

"But, for God's sake, what can I do?" pleaded Sig. "Give me some hint."

"I've already told you all I can," said the other. "The decision lies with the White House. If you want to picket any place, go there. Very certainly you won't accomplish anything anywhere else."

VI

Sig went off and bought an afternoon paper, and read that the White House was already being picketed. An army of unemployed had come to town, a thousand ragged and hungry men and women, hitchhiking or riding freights in the bitterest

winter in history. Now they were marching up and down in front of the White House, with placards and slogans: "We want work! We demand food!" They were "Communist-led," so the papers declared, and quite possibly the papers were right; but still the police let them march—it was election year. The White House did not intend to repeat the blunder which Mr. Herbert Hoover had made with the bonus marchers.

Their numbers grew, and they were all over Washington, in front of the Capitol, and the House and Senate office buildings. They rubbed their bellies, and yowled: "We are hungry! Give us food!" It rather discounted the picketing business, and Sig gave up any idea he may have had.

The snows in the mountains melted suddenly, and the rivers were pouring down great floods. The Potomac was threatening to inundate the capital, and undermine some of the ten-million-dollar marble buildings; thousands of men were piling sandbags along the embankments. All over the north-east the river towns were under water, and the people, threatened with famine and disease, were clamouring for Federal relief. The businessmen of the towns clamoured loudest of all—while at the same time they denounced all other kinds of Federal relief in all other places. It was a curious illustration of the mental blindness produced by a system of "rugged individualism."

Sig went to see the senators again, to ask more letters to the President. But he found now that the Senate was very busy; it had constituted itself into a high tribunal to try a crooked judge. For nine days the august body listened to testimony, and then voted its verdicts. There were seven counts to the indictment, and the Senate voted not guilty on the first six. The seventh repeated all the six charges, and on this they voted guilty. "Oh, but it's a mess!" wrote Sig to Maisie.

The tasks of government had become too great. It was not that the country had grown too big, but that the industrial system, in its breakdown, was throwing upon the government a mass of new tasks for which it was not adapted, and which its legislators and executives did not understand. All this tangle of new commissions and bureaus and "administrations," against which the reactionaries raved, were efforts to repair the cracks in the economic structure and keep it from total collapse.

The thing that was so pitifully lacking was understanding.

Men simply did not realize what they had to do, and if you told them, their minds could not face the prospect. They had been taught that you could not plan industry, nobody could do it, and those who talked about doing it were cranks and visionaries. Having said that, they went ahead to plan—but always without planning to plan. The raw fact which confronted them was that if they didn't plan, half the people in the country would be out of work and starving within a few years.

The few who had thought their way through this problem and really understood it hung around on the outskirts of society, having no place in it, trying in vain to break in. Sig Soren, for example, having studied in mining camps and the forecables of ships, and having no academic degrees or credentials—how was anyone to know that he really knew? When he got hold of the ear of a "solon," what was that worried and overworked politician to make of him? Was he an angel out of the skies, or was he a harmless nut, or a dangerous conspirator? Should he be trusted and helped, or should he be shunned and banished? For such a decision the "solon" was but poorly equipped.

A curious thing: Sig made an impression upon one of the most reactionary of the Republican senators. This gentleman, possessing hereditary wealth and an honoured name, was dumbfounded by the things which had happened to the United States in the past six and one-half years. He was like a man lost in a heavy snowstorm or fog; he did not know which way to turn. He continued to make Republican speeches, such as his distinguished grandfather had taught him; but privately he would say: "But what are we going to *do*? None of us has a plan—not one!"

He had a chat with this self-educated workingman, who not only had a plan but had put it into effect. He had taken a thousand unemployed workers and got them to a point where they were half able to take care of themselves; he declared, and proved it with figures, that with a mere hundred and eighty-two thousand dollars—one hundred and eighty-two dollars per family—he could make his thousand families self-supporting. And he would take hardly any business away from businessmen—only what they were getting out of the dole, which was manifestly no gain to them in the long run, because it was a debt against the government, and would have

to be paid out of taxes. If this fellow Soren's plan was applied to all the unemployed, it would cost no more than the dole was costing each year, or at most two years—and it would be a capital investment.

"Write me a speech," said the senator, "and I'll deliver it." So Sig went back to his lodging-house room, and took off his pants and put them under the mattress to press them, and put his overcoat and all the bedding over him, and blew on his numb fingers. He had had no dinner—the members of the Self-Help Exchange were collecting pennies to keep him going, but the money had not arrived on time. Sig had a pencil and paper, and he wrote a speech, a carefully guarded psychological speech, suitable for a conservative Republican to deliver in favour of Reciprocal Economy. Ellis, the friendly bureaucrat, let him type it in his office next morning, and the senator read it, and said it was marvellously right—exactly his style.

But then he gave it to one of his associates to read, and there were objections and warnings. The idea looked very much like Socialism; had the senator inquired whether the unknown stranger was a Socialist or not? The senator was being talked of for the presidential nomination of his party; a project like this might alarm his friends—and so on, and so on. The upshot of it was that the senator did not deliver the speech, and Sig rewrote parts of it, and it was delivered by a young "radical" congressman.

VII

Mrs. Virginia Beverly Trent was motoring with some friends, and stopped off in San Sebastian to see her daughter. Mrs. Trent had a nice story to tell her friends just now: "My son-in-law has gone to Washington to interview the President about an endowment for his College of Reciprocal Economy." It sounded most impressive; and of course it would be better yet if Mrs. Trent could say: "My son-in-law had his interview with the President, and has got an endowment for his College of Reciprocal Economy."

Maisie took her mother aside and told the painful truth; that Sig hadn't been able to get near the President, but was hanging on by his eyeteeth, and racking his wits as to what to do next. Maisie did not even withhold the dreadful fact that

her husband had gone out on the street as a beggar, and had been shot at by a policeman. Yes, for they were married now, the ex-sailor and ex-convict was in the family, and there was no way to get him out—not for a devout Episcopalian like Mrs. Virginia. "For better for worse . . . in sickness and in health . . . till death us do part!"

Mrs. Virginia first wrung her hands and cried in distress; then she began to think. She bethought her of an old school friend who lived in Washington, and was wealthy and prominent in society. Possibly she might be able to help, and certainly it could do no harm to try, because, after all, Sig was really a good man, even if he was not precisely the tea-party type. Family pride now drove Mrs. Virginia to defend him, just as fiercely as she had resisted him before he broke in.

The upshot was that Maisie sent off to her husband by air mail a letter of introduction to a certain Mrs. Sallie Page Thatcher, telling this one-time schoolmate that Mrs. Virginia had a most interesting and unusual son-in-law who was now in Washington, promoting a very important idea, about which Mrs. Sallie would be glad to hear. Sending this letter to her husband, Maisie wrote: "In old times the court ladies and mistresses of kings fought and intrigued, and often brought nations to war. The same kind of ladies still have the same kind of power, and if you can get one on your side it may mean victory."

Sig smiled. He hadn't much faith in great ladies, but he sent off the letter, with one of his own, giving his address. By return mail came a note on fashionable stationery, inviting him to have tea with the lady at four o'clock that afternoon. So there was Sig, standing in front of the cracked mirror in his fourth-floor back hall room, inspecting his \$13.48 suit, and his pants pressed by sleeping on them, brushing his hair two or three times, and trimming off bits of the tiny red-brown moustache which he had grown in the effort to become more fashionable.

Mrs. Sallie Page Thatcher lived in an old but elegant mansion on a fashionable avenue. She was the widow of a wealthy man, and besides that, she came of a Virginian family, and in her home were oil portraits of naval ancestors, and the brass plate from the quarterdeck of a frigate which her great-grandfather had commanded. Being a Virginian, she was a

Democrat, and the combination of these circumstances made her a person of importance to any Washington lobbyist or promoter. Sig Soren, having done his studying in forecables and never on the quarter-deck, was unaware of this.

She had been a great beauty in her day, and had taken care of her gifts, and was still nice to look at. 'Also she smelled pleasant, and her voice was soft and lingering, with that funny old Virginian accent—she talked about her "gyarden." She was attentive to her queer visitor, and did all she could to make him feel at home. Poor Sig, he hadn't any idea what to do at a tea party; he had those big hands and feet, and didn't know where to put them. He would have liked to get them under his chair, but big soft chairs are not built that way, and Sig's feet stuck out in front, and he knew his heels were nearly worn off with so much walking between the offices of the bureaucrats—and ladies always notice things like that.

But Sig was there to tell about the Self-Help Exchange and the workings of Reciprocal Economy; and when he once got going he forgot all other worries. He found, much to his surprise, that this elegant lady of old Virginia had a mind. She had never heard anything at all about co-operatives; but she asked many questions, and they were intelligent questions, not to be contrived by one who was just pretending.

Also, she had a sense of humour. She knew that human beings are queer, and she was interested in stories about people in the co-op, and how they managed them. She was entranced when Sig told how he had dealt with the leisure classes and the businessmen—Old Thee Fleming and Mrs. Pat had once visited her home, it appeared, and George Reverdy Mills might have been one of her numerous cousins. The Self-Help Exchange came to life in her imagination.

She wanted to know all about this self-educated working-man who had brought her such an interesting story. She wanted to know where he had got his ideas. He told her about having been in jail—not taking chances of having somebody else tell. It didn't shock her; she said she was quite prepared to believe there were a lot of men in jail who ought to be out, and certainly she knew some who were out and ought to be in. That was the way members of the ruling classes talked, Sig learned; they were nearly all of them natural-born anarchists.

VIII

The time came to get down to business. "Just what are you here to do?" asked Mrs. Sallie; and Sig explained that he had three things in mind, first a grant or loan of a hundred and eighty-two thousand dollars for the co-op, to enable it to become self-sustaining; second, a grant for the College of Reciprocal Economy, which was training leaders for co-operative production; and finally, a bill to be passed by Congress appropriating seventy-five million dollars for the developing of self-help co-operatives all over the country. He told about his struggle with the bureaucrats, his discussions with senators and congressmen, and his unsuccessful efforts to get to the President.

Said Mrs. Sallie: "It seems to me that Mrs. Roosevelt ought to be interested in this. She often takes things to her husband."

"That's what I've been told," replied Sig. "Oh, could you help me to that?"

"I think I might. First, I would ask you to meet a friend of mine, Mrs. Basil Harmon. She has a great deal of influence, and it would be helpful to have her support."

Now Sig had heard of the Harmon family, among the really rich people of the country, and he got a startled realization of the dizzy altitude to which he had climbed. Mrs. Sallie went to the phone, and called her friend, and told her a little about the unusual man she had met, and made an appointment for this lady to come to her home the following afternoon. When Sig went away, he was walking on air; for Mrs. Sallie had told him that if he could persuade Mrs. Harmon to approve the plan, the two of them would take him to the White House.

Next day another tea party; and poor Sig—instead of getting used to such ceremonies, he got into a worse panic than ever, and went and had his shoes specially shined, and got himself a new necktie to match his \$13.48 secondhand suit. He even thought of getting a spring hat; but he reflected that his hat had been seen by nobody but Mrs. Sallie's coloured butler, and so he would put off further expenditures till he was sure he would get into the White House!

Mrs. Basil Harmon was a slender woman, grave in manner and rather sad-looking; Sig thought she must have had a good

deal of sorrow in her life, and kept it to herself. She had been active in public affairs for years, and was sympathetic to union labour; Sig realized quickly that she was not an amateur like Mrs. Sallie. She knew about the self-help and barter idea, and her questions were technical ones. He explained his double aim—a model co-operative, to show how the job could be done, and growing out of that, a school to teach the system, and train leaders to go out and start new groups.

He told about the round table, which was a real invention, a social discovery. He gave illustrations of how it overcame difficulties. He took the co-op section by section and told what each was doing, what equipment it was proposed to purchase with the Federal money, and how many persons that would put at work.

Mrs. Harmon was used to figures, it appeared. She knew the difference between money for relief, a recurrent expenditure, and money for land and machinery, a capital investment. She asked how much capital the Exchange had been able to accumulate by its own efforts, and how much it had from grants; how many persons it had helped, and just what percentage of relief that represented. She wanted to know what percentage of the co-op's activities could be considered as taken away from private business; that was the first thing the businessmen would be thinking about. How much loss in profits did it mean to businessmen, and what percentage did that bear to the total production of the co-op? Sig had once figured this out for Mr. Simkin, the wood merchant; he said it might be five, it certainly couldn't be more than ten per cent.

"In other words," said Mrs. Harmon, "if the businessmen would sacrifice one or two hundred million dollars of their profits, the government could do a two-billion-dollar relief job without any taxes or bond issues?"

"That's it exactly!" said Sig. How marvellous to find a woman who could figure in her head!

Mrs. Sallie was concerned that the human interest element should not be left out, so she asked this student of psychology to tell how he had won over the rich people of San Sebastian. It turned out that Mrs. Harmon knew Mr. George Reverdy Mills, and was greatly entertained by Sig's story. "I know how difficult it is to win such people," she said. "They are conditioned by their environment."

"Partly," Sig answered; "but also there are differences in

people. You don't seem to be conditioned by your environment."

"And yet I am," answered Mrs. Harmon, with a smile. Sig judged he hadn't hurt his cause by that remark.

Suddenly the lady said: "I think Mrs. Roosevelt ought to know about this. Would you like us to take you to her?"

"Oh, my!" gasped Sig. And the other went to the phone, and called the White House, and asked for a certain secretary. A moment later she was saying: "This is Mrs. Harmon, and I am at the home of Mrs. Thatcher. She has introduced me to a gentleman who has a self-help co-operative which I think Mrs. Roosevelt would be interested to hear about, and we would like to bring him to see her."

Mrs. Harmon listened a moment, and then turned to Sig. "Could you go to-morrow at five?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" cried Sig, as fast as he could get the words out. Mrs. Harmon said into the phone that they would be there, and hung up. Just as simple as that—when you had met two ladies of the court!

IX

Sig Soren rolling up to the White House in a big limousine with a coloured chauffeur in a grey uniform, and entering the door between two ladies, in those costumes which are really uniforms, in spite of the fact that they are all different. This time no attendants stepped up to Sig's side and waited while he stated his business, looking as if they were about to "frisk" him—as the Capitol police had already done! Instead, an elderly coloured man in a black suit respectfully took his shiny new hat, and looked in vain for his gloves; another escorted the party to the elevator, and a secretary met them at the floor above to take them to the proper room.

It was a hundred and thirty-seven years since this mansion had first been occupied by a staunch foe of the British sovereign, John Adams. In those years many famous persons had trod its floors, and looked at its pictures and decorations, as the awestricken Sig Soren was now doing. In the large room to which he was taken there were seated at least a dozen young misses, apparently schoolgirls, all dressed up to the minute, and all aquiver with excitement. Poor Sig's heart sank a long way down. Was he going to have to explain

reciprocal economy to these? His tea-party terror seized him again. What in the world would he do with his feet now? All these twelve pairs of eyes would presently become fixed upon his worn-down shoes; twelve pairs of brain-lobes, conditioned by their environment, would be thinking: "What is this base-born varlet doing here?"

A lady entered the room; rather tall and slender, like Mrs. Harmon, wearing a grey silk gown, rather long—Sig hadn't noticed it, but they were wearing them long again, those who could afford the extra material. She was introduced to the bevy of misses, and shook hands and smiled at each, and then they trooped off, perfectly happy because for the rest of their lives they could tell their friends that they had met the "first lady of the land"! Sig drew a big breath of relief; he wasn't going to have to explain reciprocal economy to them!

He was introduced to a kind and gracious woman. He shook hands with her, that being the Western fashion; he had learned not to exert any pressure, an important lesson for one with his excess of strength. She had come to hear what he had to say, and was straightforward about it. She gave only a few words of greeting to her women friends, calling each by her first name. Then she motioned Sig to a chair by her side, and said: "Now, what have you to tell me?"

It was the moment for which Sig had been saying informal prayers for a couple of months. He made his speech straight through, and Mrs. Roosevelt listened attentively, and now and then put a question which showed that she was getting the import of what she was hearing.

An independent and open-minded woman in the White House! A "first lady of the land" who thought for herself, and spoke her thoughts freely! It had not happened before in the history of America, and the reactionaries frothed at the mouth over it. But to Sig it was a source of such happiness as he had not known in Washington. He was led to believe that he was speaking to a friend of his ideas, a friend of the poor people of the country; one actively trying to help them, and find ways for her husband to help them.

It took Sig about twenty minutes to give a tabloid edition of his story: the co-op, and its round table, and its members, and its various activities, the goods it had produced for its people, the money it had saved the government, the loan which would enable it to save much more, and the WPA policy which

was going to wreck it if not changed. Mrs. Roosevelt asked a few more questions, and then said: "I think my husband would wish to know about this. Will you wait while I see what can be done?"

They would wait! The two ladies beamed upon their protégé. "You did very well," said Mrs. Harmon; and Sig, scared stiff inside, answered: "I have no words to thank you." The lady answered that he had put his words to better use.

The President's wife came back, and told Sig that he was to be at the White House office at ten o'clock the following morning. "You will have fifteen minutes," said she, "and have him while his mind is fresh. He has a very wearing job, you know."

"I don't see how he ever stands it," said Mrs. Sallie. "I don't see how you stand it, Eleanor."

Said she: "I have to run away and hide in some friend's house every now and then, or else I might snap at somebody. You know, a President's wife has to be always smiling."

"Come and hide in my house some day," said Mrs. Sallie; and the other answered, "All right, I will."

X

Mrs. Roosevelt had advised Sig to get up a written statement about the co-op and what it wanted, and to leave that with the President for his study. Sig had from six in the evening to ten the next morning to prepare that, and he worked as he had seldom worked before. As ill luck would have it, he developed a raging headache, also a tooth started up; he was paying the penalty for two months of haphazard diet and general disregard of his health. But nobody could stop him this night. The friendly congressman let him use his office with the typewriter, and Sig put his story under a series of headlines: "What is Reciprocal Economy? What has it done in San Sebastian? What can it do in the whole state of California?"—and so on. It was midnight when he had this to his satisfaction; then he had to type it all clean for the presidential eye. By that time it was nearly dawn, and Sig was so wrought up he couldn't sleep a wink.

There would be time enough for sleep in the bus going back. Sig bathed and shaved and dressed, and had a cup of

coffee. Then he got a morning newspaper, and one of the first items he read was from San Sebastian, California, to the effect that a jury had brought in a verdict against half a dozen Communists charged with "criminal syndicalism," as a result of their efforts to organize the agricultural workers for a strike. The names of the Communists were given, and three of them were known to Sig: Jane Pitter, Jake Burrige, and Lawrence T. Peck; they stood to get from one to twenty years. Sig, of course, knew the story back of their case; Henry Bodkin, the former butler, had told him about the dinner party at the home of Parley's Pellets. This conviction meant that Len Saugus, and not his sister, was to guide affairs in California—and guide them into civil war and Fascism!

Fifteen minutes ahead of time Sig presented himself at the White House office building, with his new hat, and his shoes freshly rubbed, and the most winning smile in his repertory. He would have been more than human if he had not felt a little amusement at the change in the secretaries. They had been so cold and aloof, and now were so polite! He had got in by the back door, as it were; they resented it, as being not quite sporting—a man hiding under a petticoat—but there was nothing they could do about it. The President was going to talk with another crank, and get another swarm of bees in his bonnet, and they and their big business friends might have to work for weeks to get it out again!

Sig was seated in what they call the "Council Chamber," waiting. It was a large room, with a long table in the centre. Sig's heart was thumping, and so, alas, was his tooth. It is hard to think about anything else when you have toothache; but Sig was thinking: "Poverty is a toothache!" He was thinking: "End Poverty!" Sig was a propagandist who could put even a toothache to moral uses.

Sig was thinking: "Now I am going to see him!" And then: "Will he really give me a chance?" And then: "Don't lose your head now! Don't let him flatter you!" Then: "I am going to give it to him straight. Those people back home are going to get a hearing." The thin eager face of Cristy Jett flashed before Sig's mental eye. "You tell that Mr. President to come out here an' see how us folks is livin'!"

The secretary came in, and led Sig to a door and opened it. There was another large room, and at the far side was a large desk, and at this desk sat a large man, having a large head

and a large face. On it was a smile which all the world has seen, and from it came a voice which all the world has heard. "Hello, Mr. Soren"—a warm and cordial voice, as all the world knows. "I am glad to see you. The Missus has told me about you. Come sit down." It was as if he had known Sig all his life. It was the well-known Roosevelt charm, against which Sig had warned himself!

XI

"My wife has been telling me about you and your plan," said the President of the United States. "I am much interested in these ideas. We are planning something of the sort in the District of Columbia, and we may do it with scrip."

He went on to tell about this plan; and it was worse than any toothache to poor Sig. "Oh, dear!" he thought. "Have I got to lose my precious time listening to a story about scrip?" It had been tried in California a score of times. It worked for a while, until people found they could not get the things they needed most. What was the sense of the Federal government issuing scrip, when it had the power to issue real money? Only one possible reason—if they wanted to keep people under a special, substandard regime.

Sig didn't say a word, for fear of starting an argument; and at last the President stopped, and said: "Well, tell me about your proposition."

Sig was a man of inspirations, which are often dangerous, but sometimes epoch-making. He decided suddenly to depart from his text. "Mr. President, I chose this day, so very important to me, to have a pounding toothache."

"I am sorry to hear that."

"When you have a toothache, it is hard to think about anything else. And all the time I have been saying to myself: Poverty is a toothache!"

The well-known smile was lighted up. "You said it!"

"Mass poverty is millions of toothaches, all pounding at once. We in California have a full million of them, and they are raising the very dickens with us."

"I know about it, Mr. Soren."

"Mr. President, a little group of about a thousand of us have found a way to help ourselves out of poverty, and we

were winning out fast. But they have sent me here to tell you a tragic story. Their efforts are being destroyed—all their work of three and a half years—and it is your policy that is doing it."

"How is that? "

"We can't get any cash money, the relief administration won't permit it. We're not allowed to sell anything in the open market—we had to make a gentlemen's agreement with Herbert Alding that we would never sell more than twenty per cent of our products in the market—even when the goods had been produced with equipment we had bought for ourselves, and not with Federal grant money. The result is that we can't get even carfare for our people, and so they have to take relief. The relief people order them on to work relief—which means they are took away from the co-operative and put at tasks they don't know about."

"That is a result that wasn't contemplated, Mr. Soren."

"It often happens that things don't work out like you want, Mr. President. We all hope you don't mean to wipe out the self-help groups."

"We surely don't. We think them a very worthwhile experiment."

"Mr. President, you can't imagine what the difference is to a man between working in a co-op and working with the WPA. It's hardly to be put into words. The people in the co-op are working for themselves; their heart is in it; they work and plan day and night. The co-op builds their self-respect; they see a future, a way to be independent, to build something for their children to have and enjoy. And then all of a sudden they are took out of this work, and set to digging a ditch or sewing shirts, some kind of work they never done in their lives before; they are working under a boss that is a political appointee—I know you don't want it, but that's the way it works out. It's work that nobody cares anything about, it's all done listless and dead-like, there's no hope in it, no future—it's just as apt to be stopped in the middle, as if somebody had forgot what it was all about. Mr. President, our people are real workers, they are old fellows that learned in the old days what real work is, and they can't bear to see labour standards go to pieces, and all the skills being lost, and the young people not getting no training"—when Sig became deeply moved he reverted

to those standards of English which had prevailed in mining camps and the forecastles of ships.

"Just the other day, Mr. President, one of our fellows cut his throat rather than do the kind of work the WPA set him at."

"I am sorry to hear that, Mr. Soren," said the other. It was a distressing line of conversation, and one could understand why his secretaries sought to spare him such ordeals.

XII

Sig Soren was now being subjected to the process which he had heard about, exposure to the presidential charm. The man made you feel that what you had to tell him was the most important and interesting thing in the whole world. He seemed to put his soul into everything he said and did. If you told him something sad, as the visitor had done, he was deeply moved and sympathetic. If you said something funny, he threw back his head and laughed loudly. You couldn't help feeling that he was a kind man; and presently you would realize that he knew what he was talking about. You would find yourself making excuses for all the foolish things you knew he had sanctioned.

"Tell me, Mr. Soren," said he, "exactly how your co-op is organized, and what you have done."

So there was Sig, launched at last on his regular speech, and half his time gone already. He brought out the main points: the round table, and how it worked and how under it democracy was actually functioning in production and distribution of goods; the policy of fair play and honest dealing; the way they had won over the businessmen of their community; the little real harm their project had done to private business; the large amount it had saved the government. All that was important in an election year.

"We really offer you the solution to the problem of unemployment, Mr. President; and you know you haven't solved it yet."

"I know that, Mr. Soren," was the answer, with disarming frankness. "Your way has been continually in my thoughts. But you know, I can't go any faster than the people will let me."

Sig knew that this was a formula; he said it to all those

on the "left." It was true, of course; but how much he could contribute to the "letting," if only he would! "If you would make just one speech in favour of production for use, Mr. President! I was told that you meant to do it, a year and a half ago."

"There are many factors to be considered," said the other. Evidently he was not prepared to be frank about that, and Sig knew better than to press him.

He went on with his story. "If ever you decide to let the unemployed produce, Mr. President, you will find use for a model self-help co-op, which has shown how. That is our job. We started with absolutely nothing. The first men that had this idea was sleeping in what was called Pipe City, in an empty sewer pipe. We worked, and we built, and we are now providing half support for a thousand men and their families. We have accumulated about a hundred and forty thousand dollars of equipment, half by our own efforts and half by relief grants. We ask for a hundred and eighty-two thousand more, and if we can get that, we can be independent of relief, and go ahead and build for ourselves."

"That is only three hundred dollars per worker. Can you really do it for that?"

"We have proved it, sir; I have all the figures here for you. Mrs. Roosevelt suggested that I should put it all on paper, and I have worked all night to get it ready for you."

"Well, you leave it with me, and I will promise to study it. I can't give you a decision now, of course, but I will certainly consider the matter, and I will see that Mr. Harkness does also."

The secretary had entered the room. It was his duty to watch the schedule, and keep a too genial and talkative Chief in order. "Senator Keating is here, sir, with his deputation."

"All right," replied the Chief; and Sig knew that the interview was over. He got up.

"Mr. President," he said, "we have in our co-op a poor little share-cropper who was turned out of his cabin in Louisiana, and brought his wife and half a dozen kids out to California in a broken-down old flivver. He's a singer and composer of what he calls 'balletts,' and a bit of a genius in his way; he's been working with us for three years now, very faithfully. Just before I left he got up in meeting and asked me to take a message to you."

"What is the message?"

"He said: 'Tell that Mr. President to come out here to Californy and see fo' himself how us folks is livin'!' "

"I know what you mean," said the President. "It is not easy for a man in my position to keep in touch with the people."

"Cristy Jett didn't ask me to tell you this, Mr. President, but he is one of the victims of the policy which is driving people out of the co-op: a few months ago we learned that he killed their half-starved pet dog and made a stew for the kids."

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed the President of the United States; and the secretary to the President frowned angrily. No doubt, it was an outrageous thing for a visitor to do; but Sig went out with a good conscience, feeling that he had put at least one thing into the man's mind that would stick there.

Outside he said to the secretary: "Shall I wait in Washington for the President's answer to our application?"

The other replied, hastily: "No, you can go home. I will let you know whatever he has to tell you."

Sig smiled to himself, grimly. He knew how little that secretary desired his presence at the gates of the White House!

XIII

Sig went away, thinking it over. He was too old a bird to be caught with chaff. He had made up his mind in advance that he was not going to let his head be turned by the honour of getting into the White House, while so many others were being turned away. "F.D." was a kind and genial man, nobody disputed it; but the people of the Self-Help Exchange of San Sebastian couldn't live on kind words and agreeable manners; they had to have cash, and this man had it in his keeping.

Sig told himself that he couldn't be sure of having accomplished one single thing. To be sure, he had put some ideas into the presidential head; but how long would they stay? Senator Keating was there with his deputation, and the presidential head was even now being filled with an entirely different set of ideas. It would be that way all day long, one urgent person after another, shoving things into the presidential head. And without doubt they all had carefully prepared

theses and documents, and left them with the President, and he promised to study them. There had been a pile of them a foot high on his desk, the crop of the previous day, or else a selection from the morning's mail.

It was too much to expect one human being to do; and Sig's heart was heavy with the sense that he had failed. The only success would have been to have the man's face light up with conviction, and have him say on the spot: "All right, Mr. Soren, your co-op shall have the loan."

No doubt he had done that in some cases; he was called dangerously impulsive. A hundred billion dollars of vested capital was concentrating all its powers upon the task of checking that impulsiveness, watching it, spying upon it, keeping it surrounded with restrictions, pouring a Niagara flood of warnings, fears and threats upon it. Nine black-robed old men sat in a ten-million-dollar marble palace, and concentrated their legal sorcery upon the task. Two thousand capitalist newspapers, each one a citadel of power, had hired the best brains in the country, and set them to helping at the task. Radio stations, churches, schools, colleges—every form of vested interest was concentrated upon the task of keeping the impulsive Franklin D. Roosevelt from saying to some crusader of idealism: "Yes, that's a good thing, and we'll do it!"

Just now it was election year; and Sig knew in his heart that despite all smiles and all promises, he and his co-oppers would have to starve along for another six months. He had to face the reason for that grim decision. If Roosevelt failed of re-election on the third of November, he would go out on the twentieth of January, and what could be the use of all the kindness and geniality and sympathy after that? He would be just one more old gentleman travelling around making speeches at banquets, and reading about himself in the history books, or perhaps writing one, entitled, *How I Got Licked*.

What would he do in the event that he won? Would he go "right" or would he go "left"? That was the question of the time, and everybody speculated and argued, but nobody knew. Sig Soren thanked the two kind ladies, and had his aching tooth pulled, and packed his bag, and got into the bus, and settled back in his seat, and, with his tongue in the place where the tooth had been, he pondered his adventurous

weeks as a lobbyist in the cause of the people. He put to himself the problem which was racking the mind of every friend of the people of America: "Can I support Roosevelt this time? Or should I help start the Farmer-Labour party?"

Sig knew that thousands of votes in San Sebastian depended upon the story that he brought back and the advice that he gave. He knew that word would go out all over the state, and in a close election the vote of the Self-Help Exchange might decide what would happen in California. And California in turn might decide for the whole United States—it had happened just that way only twenty years ago. Quite a decision for a man to make on a five-day bus ride, with his tongue sucking an empty hole in his jaw!

Quite a decision for the President of the United States to make, with all the businessmen of America pulling him one way and all the idealists and dreamers of social justice pulling him the other! Should he let the unemployed get hold of the land and the tools, and set to work to build themselves a new world, with new freedom and independence for all workers? Should he permit them to make a demonstration of the fact that they could do such a job, and that they wanted to? It was very, very dangerous, in the eyes of everyone who believed in the profit system, and thought it could be patched and kept going. It would, in truth, be the most revolutionary event in present-day America.

What was Franklin D. Roosevelt going to answer?

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